SUSAN CLEGG

AND HER FRIEND MRS. LATHROP

W. J. EARLIGHT.

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AND

Her Friend Mrs. Lathrop

By
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SUSAN CLEGG

And her Friend Mrs. Lathrop

I

THE MARRYING OF SUSAN CLEGG

SUSAN CLEGG and Mrs. Lathrop were next-door neighbors and bosom friends. Their personalities were extremely congenial, and the theoretical relation which the younger woman bore to the elder was a further bond between them. Owing to the death of her mother some twenty years before, Susan had fallen into the position of a helpless and timid young girl whose only key to the problems of life in general had been the advice of her older and wiser neighbor. As a matter of fact Mrs. Lathrop was barely twelve years the senior, but she had married and as a consequence felt and was felt to be immeasurably the more ancient of the two.

Susan had never married, for her father — a bedridden paralytic — had occupied her

time day and night for years. He was a great care and as she did her duty by him with a thoroughness which was praiseworthy in the extreme she naturally had very little leisure for society. Mrs. Lathrop had more, because her family consisted of but one son, and she was not given to that species of housekeeping which sweeps under the beds too often. It therefore came about that the one and only recreation which the friends could enjoy together to any great extent was visiting over the fence. Visiting over the fence is an occupation in which any woman may indulge without fear of unkind criticism. If she takes occasion to run in next door, she is of course leaving the house which she ought to be keeping, but she can lean on the fence all day without feeling derelict as to a single duty. Then, too, there is something about the situation which produces a species of agreeable subconsciousness that one is at once at home and abroad. It followed that Susan and Mrs. Lathrop each wore a path from her kitchen door to the trysting-spot, and that all summer long they met there early and late.

Mrs. Lathrop did the listening while she

chewed clover. Just beyond her woodpile red clover grew luxuriantly, and when she started for the place of meeting it was her invariable custom to stop and pull a number of blossoms so that she might eat the tender petals while devoting her attention to the business in hand.

It must be confessed that the business in hand was nearly always Miss Clegg's business, but since Mrs. Lathrop, in her position of experienced adviser, was deeply interested in Susan's exposition of her own affairs, that trifling circumstance appeared of little moment.

One of the main topics of conversation was Mr. Clegg. As Mr. Clegg had not quitted his bed for over a score of years, it might seem that his novelty as a subject of discussion would have been long since exhausted. But not so. His daughter was the most devoted of daughters, and his name was ever rife on her lips. What he required done for him and what he required done to him were the main ends of her existence, and the demands of his comfort, daily or annual, resulted in numerous phrases of a startling but thoroughly intelligible order.

Of such a sort was her usual Saturday morning greeting to Mrs. Lathrop, "I 'm sorry to cut you off so quick, but this 's father's day to be beat up and got into new pillow-slips," or her regular early-June remark, "Well, I thank Heaven 't father 's had his hair picked over 'n' 't he 's got his new tick for *this* year!"

Mrs. Lathrop was always interested, always sympathetic, and rarely ever startled; yet one July evening when Susan said suddenly, "I 've finished my dress for father's funeral," she did betray a slight shock.

"You ought to see it," the younger woman continued, not noticing the other's start, — "it 's jus' 's *nice.* I put it away in camphor balls, 'n' Lord knows I don't look forward to the gettin' it out to wear, f'r the whole carriage load 'll sneeze their heads off whenever I move in that dress."

"Did you put newspaper — " Mrs. Lathrop began, mastering her earlier emotions.

"In the sleeves? Yes, I did, 'n' I bought a pair o' black gloves 'n' two handkerchiefs 'n' slipped 'em into the pockets. Everythin' is all fixed, 'n' there 'll be nothin' to do when father dies but to shake it out

'n' lay it on the bed in his room. I say 'in his room,' 'cause o' course that day he 'll be havin' the guest-room. I was thinkin' of it all this afternoon when I sat there by him hemmin' the braid on the skirt, 'n' I could n't but think 't if I sit 'n' wait very much longer I sh'll suddenly find myself pretty far advanced in years afore I know it. This world 's made f'r the young 's well 's the old, 'n' you c'n believe me or not jus' 's you please, Mrs. Lathrop, but I 've always meant to get married 's soon 's father was off my hands. I was countin' up to-day, though, 'n' if he lives to be a hunderd, I 'll be nigh onto seventy 'n' no man ain't goin' to marry me at seventy. Not 'nless he was eighty, 'n' Lord knows I ain't intendin' to bury father jus' to begin on some one else, 'n' that 's all it 'd be."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

"I set there thinkin' f'r a good hour, 'n' when I was puttin' away the dress, I kep' on thinkin', 'n' the end was 't now that dress 's done I ain't got nothin' in especial to sew on 'n' so I may jus' 's well begin on my weddin' things. There 's no time like the present, 'n' 'f I married this summer *he 'd*

have to pay f'r half of next winter's coal. 'N' so my mind 's made up, 'n' you c'n talk yourself blind, 'f you feel so inclined, Mrs. Lathrop, but you can't change hide or hair o' my way o' thinkin'. I 've made up my mind to get married, 'n' I 'm goin' to set right about it. Where there 's a will there 's a way, 'n' I ain't goin' to leave a stone unturned. I went down town with the kerosene-can jus' afore tea, 'n' I bought me a new false front, 'n' I met Mrs. Brown's son, 'n' I told him 't I wanted him to come up to-morrow 'n' take a look at father."

"Was you thinkin' o' marryin' Mrs. Br—" Mrs. Lathrop gasped, taking her clover from her lips.

"Marryin' Mrs. Brown's son! Well, 'f your mind don't run queer ways! Whatever sh'd put such an idea into your head? I hope you 'll excuse my sayin' so, Mrs. Lathrop, but I don't believe anybody but you would ever 'a' asked such a question, when you know 's well 's everybody else does 't he 's runnin' his legs off after Amelia Fitch. Any man who wants a little chit o' eighteen would n't suit my taste much, 'n'

anyhow I never thought of him; I only asked him to come in in a friendly way 'n' tell me how long he thinks 't father may live. I don't see my way to makin' any sort o' plans with father so dreffle indefinite, 'n' a man who was fool enough to marry me, tied up like I am now, would n't have s'fficient brains to be worth lookin' over. Mrs. Brown's son 's learnin' docterin', 'n' he 's been at it long enough so 's to be able to see through anythin' 's simple 's father, *I* sh'd think. 'T any rate, 'f he don't know nothin' yet, Heaven help Amelia Fitch 'n' me, f'r he 'll take us both in."

"Who was you thinkin' o'—" Mrs. Lathrop asked, resuming her former occupation.

"The minister," replied Miss Clegg. "I did n't stop to consider very much, but it struck me 's polite to begin with him. I c'd marry him without waitin' for father, too, 'cause a minister could n't in reason find fault over another man's bein' always to home. O' course he would n't be still like father is, but I ain't never been one to look gift-horses in the mouth, 'n' I d'n' know 's I 'd ought to expect another man *jus'* like father in one

life. Mother often said father's advantages was great, for you always knew where he was, 'n' 'f you drew down the shade you c'd tell him it was rainin' 'n' he could n't never contradick."

Mrs. Lathrop nodded acquiescently but made no comment.

Miss Clegg withdrew somewhat from her confidentially inclined attitude.

"I won't be out in the mornin'," she said. "I sh'll want to dust father 'n' turn him out o' the window afore Mrs. Brown's son comes. After he 's gone I 'll wave my dish-towel, 'n' then you come out 'n' I 'll tell you what he says."

They separated for the night, and Susan went to sleep with her own version of love's young dream.

Mrs. Brown's son arrived quite promptly the next morning. He drove up in Mr. Brown's buggy, and Amelia Fitch held the horse while he went inside to inspect Mr. Clegg. The visit did not consume more than ten minutes, and then he hurried out to the gate and was off.

The buggy was hardly out of sight up the road when Miss Clegg emerged from her

kitchen door, her face bearing an imprint of deep and thorough disgust.

"Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I don't think much o' *that* young man," she announced in a tone of unmitigated disapproval; "'peared to me like he was in a hurry to get done with father 's quick 's he could just so 's to be back beside Amelia Fitch. I 'd venture a guess that 'f you was to ask him this minute he 's forgot every word I said to him already. I asked him to set some sort of a figger on father, 'n' he would n't so much 's set down himself. Stood on one leg 'n' backed towards the door every other word, 'n' me, father's only child, standin' there at his mercy. Said 't last 's he *might* die to-morrow 'n' *might* live twenty years. I tell you my patience pretty near went at that. I don't call such a answer no answer a *tall*. I 've often thought both them things myself, 'n' me no doctor. Particularly about the twenty years. Father 's lived seventy-five years—I must say 't to my order o' thinkin' he 's pretty well set a-goin', 'n' that the life he leads ain't drainin' his vitality near 's much 's it 's drainin' mine."

Miss Clegg stopped and shook her head impatiently.

"I d'n' know when I 've felt as put out 's this. 'N' me with so much faith in doctors too. It 's a pretty sad thing, Mrs. Lathrop, when all the comfort you c'n get out of a man is the thinkin' 't perhaps God in his mercy has made him a fool. I had a good mind to tell that very thing to Mrs. Brown's son, but I thought maybe he 'd learn better later. Anyway I 'm goin' right ahead with my marriage. It 'll have to be the minister now, 'n' I can't see what I 've ever done 't I sh'd have two men around the house 't once like they 'll be, but that 's all in the hands o' Fate, 'n' so I jus' took the first step 'n' told Billy when he brought the milk to tell his father 't if he 'd come up here to-night I 'd give him a quarter for the Mission fund. I know the quarter 'll bring him, 'n' I can't help kind o' hopin' 't to-morrow 'll find the whole thing settled 'n' off my mind."

The next morning Mrs. Lathrop laid in an unusually large supply of fodder and was very early at the fence. Her son — a placid little innocent of nine-and-twenty years — was still in bed and asleep. Susan was up and washing her breakfast dishes, but the instant that she spied her friend she abruptly

abandoned her task and hastened to the rendezvous.

"Are you goin' t'—" Mrs. Lathrop called eagerly.

"No, I ain't," was the incisive reply.

Then they both adjusted their elbows comfortably on the top rail of the fence, and Miss Clegg began, her voice a trifle higher pitched than usual.

"Mrs. Lathrop, it's a awful thing for a Christian woman to feel forced to say, 'n' Lord knows I would n't say it to no one but you, but it's true 'n' beyond a question so, 'n' therefore I may 's well be frank 'n' open 'n' remark 't our minister ain't no good a *tall*.—'N' I d'n' know but I 'll tell any one 's asks me the same thing, f'r it certainly ain't nothin' f'r me to weep over, 'n' the blood be on his head from now on."

Miss Clegg paused briefly, and her eyes became particularly wide open. Mrs. Lathrop was all attention.

"Mrs. Lathrop, you ain't lived next to me 'n' known me in 'n' out 'n' hind 'n' front all these years not to know 't I 'm pretty sharp. I ain't been cheated mor' 'n twice 'n my life, 'n' one o' them times was n't my

fault, for it was printed on the band 't it would wash. Such bein' the case, 'n' takin' the minister into consideration, I do consider 't *no* man would 'a' supposed 't he could get the better o' me. It's a sad thing to have to own to, 'n' if I was anybody else in kingdom come I 'd never own to it till I got there; but my way is to live open 'n' aboveboard, 'n' so to my shame be 't told 't the minister — with all 't he's got eight children 'n' I ain't even married — is certainly as sharp as me. Last night when I see him comin' up the walk I never 'd 'a' believed 's he c'd get away again so easy, but it just goes to show what a world o' deceit this is, 'n' seein' 's I have father to clean from his windows aroun' to-day, I 'll ask you to excuse me 'f I don't draw the subjeck out none, but jus' remark flat 'n' plain 't there ain't no chance o' my *ever* marryin' the minister. You may consider that a pretty strong statement, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' I don't say myself but 't with any other man there might be a hereafter, but it was me 'n' not anybody else as see his face last night, 'n' seein' his face 'n' bein' a woman o' more brains 'n falls to the lot of yourself 'n' the majority, I may

just as well say once for all that, 's far 's the minister 's concerned, I sh'll never be married to *him*."

"What did he —" began Mrs. Lathrop.

"All 't was necessary 'n' more too. He did n't give me hardly time to state 't I was single afore he come out strong 't we 'd both better stay so. I spoke right out to his face then, 'n' told him 't my shingles was new last year 'n' it was a open question whether his 'd ever be, but he piped up f'r all the world like some o' the talkin' was his to do, 'n' said 't he had a cistern 'n' I 'd only got a sunk hogshead under the spout. I did n't see no way to denyin' *that*, but I went right on 'n' asked him 'f he could in his conscience deny 't them eight children stood in vital need of a good mother, 'n' he spoke up 's quick 's scat 'n' said 't no child stood in absolute vital need of a mother after it was born. 'N' then he branched out 'n' give me to understand 't he had a wife till them eight children all got themselves launched 'n' 't it was n't his fault her dyin' o' Rachel Rebecca. When he said 'dyin',' I broke in 'n' said 't it was Bible-true 's there was 's good fish in the sea 's ever was caught out

of it, 'n' he was impolite enough to interrupt 'n' tell me to my face 'Yes, but when a man had been caught once he was n't easy caught again.' I will own 't I was more 'n put out 't that, for o' course when I said *fish* I meant his wife 'n' me, but when he pretended to think 't I meant him I begin to doubt 's it was worth while to tackle him further. One man can lead a horse to water, but a thousand can't get him to stick his nose in 'f he don't want to, 'n' I thank my stars 't I ain't got nothin' 'n me as craves to marry a man 's appears dead-set ag'in' the idea. I asked him 'f he did n't think 's comin' into property was always a agreeable feelin', 'n' he said, 'Yes, but not when with riches come a secret thorn in the flesh,' 'n' at that I clean give up, 'n' I hope it was n't to my discredit, for no one on the face of the earth could 'a' felt 't there 'd be any good in keepin' on. But it was no use, 'n' you know 's well as I do 't I never was give to wastin' my breath, so I out 'n' told him 't I was n't giv' to wastin' my time either, 'n' then I stood up 'n' he did too. 'N' *then* I got even with him, 'n' I c'n assure you 't I enjoyed it, f'r I out 'n' told him 't I 'd changed my mind

about the quarter. So he had all that long walk for nothin', 'n' I can't in conscience deny 't I was more 'n rejoiced, for Lord knows I did n't consider 't he'd acted very obligin'."

Mrs. Lathrop ceased to chew and looked deeply sympathetic.

There was a brief silence, and then she asked, "Was you thinkin' o' tryin' any —"

Miss Clegg stared at her in amazement.

"Mrs. Lathrop! Do you think I'd give up now, 'n' let the minister see 't my marryin' depended on *his* say-so? Well, I guess not! I'm more dead-set 'n' ever, 'n' I vow 'n' declare 't I'll never draw breath till after I've stood up right in the face o' the minister 'n' the whole congregation 'n' had 'n' held some man, no matter who nor when nor where. Marryin' was goin' to have been a pleasure, now it's a business. I'm goin' to get a horse 'n' buggy this afternoon 'n' drive out to Farmer Sperrit's. I've thought it all over, 'n' I c'n tell father 't I'll be choppin' wood; then 'f he says afterwards 't he called 'n' called, I c'n say 't I was makin' so much noise 't I did n't hear him."

"You 'll have to hire — " suggested Mrs. Lathrop.

"I know, but it won't cost but fifty cents, 'n' I saved a quarter on the minister, you know. I 'd like to ask you to drive out with me, Mrs. Lathrop, but if Mr. Sperrit 's got it in him to talk like the minister did, I 'm free to confess 't, I 'd rather be alone to listen. 'N' really, Mrs. Lathrop, I must go in now. I 've got bread a-risin' 'n' dishes to do, 'n', as I told you before, this is father's day to be all but scraped 'n' varnished."

Mrs. Lathrop withdrew her support from the fence, and Miss Clegg did likewise. Each returned up her own path to her own domicile, and it was long after that day's tea-time before the cord of friendship got knotted up again.

"Did you go to the farm?" Mrs. Lathrop asked. "I was to the Sewin' So— "

"Yes, I went," said Miss Clegg, her air decidedly weary; "oh, yes, I went. I had a nice ride too, 'n' I do believe I saw the whole farm, from the pigs to the punkins."

There was a pause, and Mrs. Lathrop filled it to the brim with expectancy until she could wait no longer.

"Are you —" she finally asked.

"No," said her friend, sharply, "I ain't. He was n't a bit spry to hop at the chance, 'n' Lord knows there wa'n't no great urgin' on my part. I asked him why he ain't never married, 'n' he laughed like it was a funny subjeck, 'n' said 's long 's he never did it 't that was the least o' *his* troubles. I did n't call that a very encouragin' beginnin', but my mind was made up not to let it be *my* fault 'f the horse was a dead waste o' fifty cents, 'n' so I said to him 't if he 'd marry any woman with a little money he could easy buy the little Jones farm right next him, 'n' then 't 'd be 's clear 's day that it 'd be his own fault if he did n't soon stretch right from the brook to the road. He laughed some more 't that, 'n' said 't I did n't seem to be aware 't he owned a mortgage on the Jones farm 'n' got all 't it raised now 'n' would get the whole thing in less 'n two years."

Mrs. Lathrop stopped chewing.

"They was sayin' in the Sewin' Society 's he 's goin' to marry Eliza Gr—" she said mildly.

Miss Clegg almost screamed.

"Eliza Gringer, as keeps house for him?"

Her friend nodded.

Miss Clegg drew in a sudden breath.

"Well! 'f I'd knowed *that*, I'd never 'a' paid fifty cents for that horse 'n' buggy! Eliza Gringer! why, she's older 'n' I am, — she was to 'Cat' when I was only to 'M.' 'N' he's goin' to marry her! Oh, well, I d'n' know 's it makes any difference to me. In my opinion a man as 'd be fool enough to be willin' to marry a woman 's ain't got nothin' but herself to give him, 's likelier to be happier bein' her fool 'n he ever would be bein' mine."

There was a pause.

"Your father's just the — " Mrs. Lathrop said at last.

"Same? Oh yes, he's just the same. Seems 't I can't remember when he was n't just the same."

Then there was another pause.

"I ain't discouraged," Susan announced suddenly, almost aggressively, — "I ain't discouraged 'n' I won't give up. I'm goin' to see Mr. Weskin, the lawyer, to-morrow. They say — 'n' I never see nothin' to lead me to doubt 'em — 't he's stingy 'n' mean

for all he 's forever makin' so merry at other folks' expense; but I believe 't there 's good in everythin' 'f you 're willin' to hunt for it 'n' Lord knows 't if this game keeps up much longer I 'll get so used to huntin' 't huntin' the good in Lawyer Weskin 'll jus' be child's play to me."

"I was thinkin' —" began Mrs. Lathrop.

"It ain't no use if you are," said her neighbor; "the mosquitoes is gettin' too thick. We 'd better in."

And so they parted for the night.

The following evening was hot and breathless, the approach of Fourth of July appearing to hang heavily over all. Susan brought a palm-leaf fan with her to the fence and fanned vigorously.

"It ain't goin' to be the lawyer, either," she informed the expectant Mrs. Lathrop, "'n' I hav' n't no tears to shed over *that*. I went there the first thing after dinner, 'n' he give me a solid chair 'n' whirled aroun' in one 't twisted, 'n' I did n't fancy such manners under such circumstances a *tall*. I 'd say suthin' real serious 'n' he 'd brace himself ag'in his desk 'n' take a spin 's if I

did n't count for sixpence. I could n't seem to bring him around to the seriousness of the thing nohow. 'N' I come right out square 'n' open in the very beginnin' too, for Lord knows I 'm dead sick o' beatin' around the bush o' men's natural shyness. He whirled himself clean around two times 'n' then said 's long 's I was so frank with him 't it 'd be nothin' but a joy for him to be equally frank with me 'n' jus' say 's he 'd rather not. I told him he 'd ought to remember 's he 'd have a lot o' business when father died 'f he kept my good will, but he was lookin' over 'n' under himself to see how near to unscrewed he was 'n' if it was safe to keep on turnin' the same way any longer, 'n' upon my honor, Mrs. Lathrop, I was nigh to mad afore he got ready to remark 's father 'd left him a legacy on condition 't he did n't charge nothin' for probatin'."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

"So I come away, 'n' I declare my patience is nigh to gin out. This gettin' married is harder 'n' house-paintin' in fly-time. I d'n' know when I 've felt so tired. Here 's three nights 't I 've had to make my ideas all over new to suit a different husband each night.

It made my very bones ache to think o' pilin' them eight children 'n' the minister on top o' father, 'n' then the next night it was a good jump out to that farm, f'r I never was one to know any species o' fellow-feelin' with pigs 'n' milkin'. 'N' last night! — well, you know I never liked Mr. Weskin anyhow. But I d'n' know who I *can* get now. There 's Mrs. Healy's husband, o' course; but when a woman looks happier in her coffin 'n she ever looked out of it it's more 'n a hint to them 's stays behind to fight shy o' her husband. They say he used to throw dishes at her, 'n' I never could stand that — I 'm too careful o' my china to risk any such goin's on."

Mrs. Lathrop started to speak, but got no further.

"There 's a new clerk in the drug-store, — I see him through the window when I was comin' home to-day. He looked to be a nice kind o' man, but I can't help feelin' 't it 'd be kind o' awkward to go up to him 'n' have to begin by askin' him what my name 'd be 'f I married him. Maybe there 's them 's could do such a thing, but I 've never had nothin' about me 's 'd lead me to throw my-

self at the head o' any man, 'n' it 's too late in the day f'r me to start in now."

Mrs. Lathrop again attempted to get in a word and was again unsuccessful.

"I don't believe 't there 's another free man in the town. I 've thought 'n' thought 'n' I can't think o' one." She stopped and sighed.

"There 's Jathrop!" said Mrs. Lathrop, with sudden and complete success. Jathrop was her son, so baptized through a fearful slip of the tongue at a critical moment. He was meant to have been John.

Miss Clegg gave such a start that she dropped her fan over the fence.

"Well, Heaven forgive me!" she cried,— "'n' me 't never thought of him once, 'n' him so handy right on the other side of the fence! Did I ever!"

"He ain't thir—" said Mrs. Lathrop, picking up the fan.

"I don't care. What 's twelve years or so when it 's the woman 's 'as got the property? Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I certainly *am* obliged to you for mentionin' him, for I don't believe he ever would 'a' occurred to me in kingdom come. 'N' here I 've been worryin'

my head off ever since supper-time 'n' all for suthin' 's close 's Jathrop Lathrop. But I had good cause to worry, 'n' now 't it 's over I don't mind mentionin' the reason 'n' tellin' you frank 'n' plain 't I 'd begun on my things. I cut out a pink nightgown last night, a real fussy one, 'n' I felt sick all over 't the thought 't perhaps I 'd wasted all that cloth. There was n't nothin' foolish about cuttin' out the nightgown, for I 'd made up my mind 't if it looked too awful fancy on 't I 'd just put it away for the oldest girl when she gets married, but o' course 'f I can't get a husband stands to reason there 'll be no oldest girl, 'n' all that ten cent gingham 't Shores is sellin' off 't five 'd be a dead waste o' good stuff."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

"Do you suppose there 'll be any trouble with Jathrop? Do you suppose it 'll matter any to him which side o' the fence he lives on?"

Mrs. Lathrop shook her head slowly.

"I sh'd think he ought to be only too pleased to marry me 'f I want him to, all the days 't I tended him when he was a baby! My, but he *was* a cute little fellow! Every-

body was lookin' for him to grow up a real credit to you *then*. Well, 's far 's that goes, it 's a ill wind 't blows no good, 'n' no one c'n deny 't he 's been easy for you to manage, 'n' what 's sauce f'r the goose is sauce f'r the gander, so I sh'll look to be equally lucky."

Mrs. Lathrop looked proud and pleased.

"Why can't you ask him to-night 'n' let me know the first thing in the mornin'? That'll save me havin' to come 'way aroun' by the gate, you know."

Mrs. Lathrop assented to the obvious good sense of this proposition with one emphatic nod of her head.

"'N' I 'll come out jus' 's quick 's I can in the mornin' 'n' hear what he said; I 'll come 's soon 's ever I can get father 'n' the dishes washed up. I hope to Heaven father 'll sleep more this night 'n he did last. He was awful restless last night. He kept callin' f'r things till finally I had to take a pillow and go down on the dinin'-room lounge to keep from bein' woke up any more."

"Do you think he 's —"

"No, I don't think he 's worse; not 'nless wakin' up 'n' askin' f'r things jus' to be

aggravatin' is worse. If it is, then he is too. But, lor, there ain't no manner o' use in talkin' o' father! A watched pot *never* boils! Jathrop 's more to the point right now."

Upon this hint Mrs. Lathrop de-fenced herself, so to speak, and the friendly chat ended for that time.

The morning after, Miss Clegg was slow to appear at the summons of her neighbor. When she did approach the spot where the other stood waiting, her whole face and figure bore a weary and fretful air.

"Father jus' about kept me up this whole blessed night," she began as soon as she was within easy hearing. "I d'n' know what I want to get married f'r, when I 'm bound to be man-free in twenty-five years 'f I c'n jus' make out to live that long."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed and listened.

"If there was anythin' in the house 't father did n't ask f'r 'n' 't I did n't get him last night, it must 'a' been the cook-stove in the kitchen. I come nigh to losin' a toe in the rat-trap the third time I was down cellar, 'n' I clum that ladder to the garret so many times 't I do believe I dusted all overhead

with my hair afore mornin'. My ears is full o' cobwebs too, 'n' you know 's well 's I do 't I never was one to fancy cobwebs about me. They say 't every cloud has a silver linin', but I can't see no silver linin' to a night like last night. When the rooster crowed f'r the first time this mornin', I had it in my heart to march right out there 'n' hack off his head. If it 'd 'a' been Saturday, I 'd 'a' done 't too, 'n' relished him good at Sunday dinner!"

Miss Clegg paused and compressed her lips firmly for a few seconds; then she gave herself a little shake and descended to the main question of the day.

"Well, what did Jathrop say?"

Mrs. Lathrop looked very uncomfortable indeed, and in lieu of an answer swallowed her clover.

"You asked him, did n't you?"

"Yes, I —"

"Well, what 'd he say?"

"He ain't very —"

"My soul 'n' body! What reason did he give?"

"He 's afraid your father 's livin' on a annu—"

"Well, he ain't." Susan's tone was more than a little displeased. "Whatever else father may 'a' done, he never played no annuity tricks. He's livin' on his own property, 'n' I'll take it very kindly o' you, Mrs. Lathrop, to make that piece o' news clear to your son. My father's got bank-stock, 'n' he owns them two cottages across the bridge, 'n' the blacksmith-shop belongs to him too. There! I declare I never thought o' the blacksmith, — his wife died last winter."

"Jathrop asked me what I th—"

"Well, what 'd you tell him?"

"I said 't if your father was some older —"

Miss Clegg's eyebrows moved understandingly.

"How long is it since you've seen father?" she asked without waiting for the other to end her sentence.

"Not since your mother died, I guess; I was —"

"I wish you c'd come over 'n' take a look at him now 'n' tell me your opinion. Why can't you?"

Mrs. Lathrop reflected.

"I don't see why I can't. I 'll go in 'n' take off—"

"All right, 'n' when you 've got it off, come right over 'n' you 'll find me in the kitchen waitin' for you."

Mrs. Lathrop returned to her own house to shed her apron and wash her hands, and then sallied over to view Mr. Clegg. The two friends mounted the stair together, and entered the old man's room.

It was a scrupulously clean and bright and orderly room, and the invalid in the big white bed bore evidence to the care and attention so dutifully lavished on him. He was a very wizened little old man, and his features had been crossed and recrossed by the finger of Time until their original characteristics were nearly obliterated. The expression upon his face resembled nothing so much as a sketch which has been done over so many times that its first design is altogether lost, and if there was any answer to the riddle, it was not the mental perception of Mrs. Lathrop that was about to seize upon it.

Instead, that kindly visitor stood lost in a species of helpless contemplation, until at

last a motion of Susan's, directed towards the ordering of an unsightly fold in the wide smoothness of the counterpane, led to her bending herself to do a similar kindness upon her side of the bed. The action resulted in a slight change in her expression which Susan's watchfulness at once perceived.

"Was it a needle?" she asked quickly. "Sometimes I stick 'em in while I 'm sewin'. You see, his havin' been paralyzed so many years has got me where I 'm awful careless about leavin' needles in his bed."

"No," said Mrs. Lathrop; "it was n't a —"

"Come on downstairs again," said the hostess; "we c'n talk there."

They went down into the kitchen, and there Mrs. Lathrop seated herself and coughed solemnly.

"What is it, anyhow?" the younger woman demanded.

Mrs. Lathrop coughed again.

"Susan, did I feel a feather —"

"Yes," said Susan, in great surprise; "he likes one."

"I sh'd think it was too hot this —"

"He don't never complain o' the heat, 'n' he hates the chill o' rainy days."

Mrs. Lathrop coughed again.

Miss Clegg's interest bordered on impatience.

"Now, Susan, I ain't sayin' as it 's noways true, but I *have* heard as there 's them 's can't die on —"

"On feathers?" cried the daughter.

"Yes; they say they hold the life right in 'n' —"

Miss Clegg's eyes opened widely.

"But I could n't take it away from him, anyhow," she said, with a species of determined resignation in her voice. "I 'd have to wait 'till he wanted it took."

Mrs. Lathrop was silent. Then she rose to go. Susan rose too. They went out the kitchen door together, and down the steps. There they paused to part.

"Do you believe 't it 'd be any use me thinkin' o' Jathrop any more?" the maiden asked the matron.

"I believe I 'd try the blacksmith if I was you; he looks mighty nice Sundays."

Miss Clegg sighed heavily and turned to re-enter the house.

Mrs. Lathrop went "round by the gate" and became again an inmate of her own kitchen. There the thought occurred to her that it was an excellent morning to clean the high-shelf over the sink. For years past whenever she had had occasion to put anything up there, showers of dust and rolls of lint had come tumbling down upon her head. Under such circumstances it was but natural that a determination to some day clean the shelf should have slowly but surely been developed. Accordingly she climbed up on the edge of the sink and undertook the initiatory proceedings. The lowest stratum of dirt was found to rest upon a newspaper containing an account of one day of Guiteau's trial. Upon the discovery of the paper Mrs. Lathrop suddenly abandoned her original plan, got down from the sink, ensconced herself in her kitchen rocker, and plunged into bliss forthwith.

An hour passed pleasantly and placidly by. Bees buzzed outside the window, the kettle sizzled sweetly on the stove, the newspaper rustled less and less, Mrs. Lathrop's head sank sideways, and the calm of perfect peace reigned in her immediate vicinity.

This state of things endured not long.

Its gentle Paradise was suddenly broken in upon and rent apart by a succession of the most piercing shrieks that ever originated in the throat of a human being. Mrs. Lathrop came to herself with a violent start, sprang to her feet, ran to the door, and then stood still, completely dazed and at first unable to discern from which direction the ear-splitting screams proceeded. Then, in a second, her senses returned to her, and she ran as fast as she could to the fence. As she approached the boundary, she saw Susan standing in one of her upstairs windows and yelling at the top of her voice. Mrs. Lathrop paused for no conventionalities of civilization. She hoisted herself over the fence in a fashion worthy a man or a monkey, ran across the Clegg yard, entered the kitchen door, stumbled breathlessly up the dark back stairs, and gasped, grabbing Susan hard by the elbow, —

"What *is* it, for pity's — "

Susan was all colors and shaking as if with the ague.

"You never told me 's it 'd work so quick," she cried out.

"What would —"

"The feathers!"

"Whose feathers?"

"Father's feathers."

"Lord have mercy, Susan, you don't mean —"

"Yes, I do."

"He ain't never —"

"Yes, he is."

Mrs. Lathrop stood stricken.

Susan wiped her eyes with her apron and choked.

After a while the older woman spoke feebly.

"What did hap—"

Miss Clegg cut the question off in its prime.

"I don't know as I c'n ever tell you; it's too awful even to think of."

"But you —"

"I know, 'n' I 'm goin' to. But I tell you once for all, Mrs. Lathrop, 't this 'll be a lesson to me forever after 's to takin' the say-so o' other folks unto myself. 'N' I did n't really consider 't I was doin' so this time, f'r if I had, Lord knows I 'd 'a' landed three beds atop o' him afore

I 'd 'a' ever — " She stopped and shook convulsively.

" Go on," said Mrs. Lathrop, her curiosity getting the better of her sympathy, and her impatience ranking both.

Susan ceased sobbing, and essayed explanation.

" You see, after you was gone, he said 't he *was* pretty hot these last nights, 'n' 't that was maybe what kept him so awfully awake. I asked him if — if — maybe the feather-bed 'n' — well, Mrs. Lathrop, to put the whole in a nut-shell, we settled to move him, 'n' I moved him. I know I did n't hurt him one bit, for I 'm 's handy with — at least, I *was* 's handy with him 's I am with a broom. 'N' I laid him on the lounge, 'n' dumped that bed out into the back hall. I thought I 'd sun it 'n' put it away this afternoon, f'r *you* know 's I 'm never no hand to leave nothin' lyin' aroun'. Well, I come back 'n' got out some fresh sheets, 'n' jus' 's I was — "

The speaker halted, and there was a dramatic pause.

" Where is — " Mrs. Lathrop asked at last.

"Back in the feathers. My heaven alive! When I see what I'd done, I was that upset 't I just run 's quick 's ever I could, 'n' got the bed, 'n' dumped it right atop of him!"

There was another dramatic silence, finally broken by Mrs. Lathrop's saying slowly and gravely, —

"Susan, 'f I was you I would n't never say —"

"I ain't goin' to. I made up my mind to never tell a livin' soul the very first thing. To think o' me doin' it! To think o' all these years 't I've tended father night 'n' day, 'n' then to accidentally go 'n' do a thing like that! I declare, it fairly makes me sick all over!"

"Well, Susan, you know what a good daughter you've —"

"I know, 'n' I've been thinkin' of it. But somehow nothin' don't seem to comfort me none. Perhaps you'd better make me some tea, 'n' while I'm drinkin' it, Jathrop c'n go down town 'n' —"

"Yes," said Mrs. Lathrop, "'n' I'll go right 'n' —"

"That's right," said the bereaved, "'n' hurry."

It was a week later — a calm and lovely evening — and the two friends stood by the fence. The orphan girl was talking, while Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

"It don't seem like only a week! — seems more like a month or even a year. Well, they say sometimes, folks live a long ways ahead in a very short time, 'n' I must say 't, as far 's my observation 's extended, comin' into property always leads to experience, so I could n't in reason complain 't not bein' no exception. This 's been the liveliest week o' my life, 'n' I 'm free to confess 't I have n't cried anywhere near 's much 's I looked to. My feelin's have been pretty agreeable, take it all in all, 'n' I 'd be a born fool 'f I did n't take solid comfort sleepin' nights, 'n' I never was a fool — never was 'n' never will be. The havin' somebody to sleep in the house 's been hard, 'n' Mrs. Macy's fallin' through the cellar-flap giv' me a bad turn, but she 's doin' nicely, 'n' the minister makes up f'r anythin'. I do wish 't you 'd seen him that afternoon, Mrs. Lathrop; he did look *so* most awful sheepish, 'n' his clean collar give him dead away afore he ever opened his mouth. He set out by

sayin' 't the consolations of religion was mine f'r the askin', but I did n't take the hint, 'n' so he had to jus' come out flat 'n' say 't he 'd been thinkin' it over 'n' he 'd changed his mind. I held my head good 'n' high 't that, I c'n assure you, 'n' it was a pretty sorry look he give me when I said 't I 'd been thinkin' it over too, 'n' I 'd changed my mind too. He could 'a' talked to me till doomsday about his bein' a consolation, I 'd know it was nothin' 't changed him but me comin' into them government bonds. No man alive could help wantin' me after them bonds was found, 'n' I had the great pleasure o' learnin' that fact out o' Lawyer Weskin himself. All his species o' fun-makin' 't nobody but hisself ever sees any fun in, jus' died right out when we unlocked father's old desk 'n' come on that bundle o' papers. He give one look 'n' then all his gay spinniness oozed right out o' him, 'n' he told me 's serious 's a judge 't a woman 's rich 's I be needed a good lawyer to look out f'r her 'n' her property right straight along. Well, I was 's quick to reply 's he was to speak. 'N' I was to the point too. I jus'

up 'n' said, Yes, I thought so myself, 'n' jus' 's soon 's I got things to rights I was goin' to the city 'n' get me one."

Miss Clegg paused to frown reminiscently; Mrs. Lathrop's eyes never quitted the other's face.

"There was Mr. Sperrit too. Come with a big basket o' fresh vegetables 't he said he thought 'd maybe tempt my appetite. I d'n' know 's I ever enjoyed rappin' no one over the knuckles more 'n I did him. I jus' stopped to take in plenty o' breath 'n' then I let myself out, 'n' I says to him flat 'n' plain, I says, 'Thank you kindly, but I guess no woman in these parts 's better able to tempt her own appetite 'n' I be now, 'n' you 'll be doin' me the only kindness 't it 's in you to do me now if you 'll jus' take your garden stuff 'n' give it to some one 's is poor 'n' needin'.' He looked so crestfallen 't I made up my mind 't it was then or never to settle my whole score with him, so I up 'n' looked him right in the eye 'n' I says to him, I says, 'Mr. Sperrit, you did n't seem to jus' realize what it meant to me that day 't I took that horse 'n' buggy 'n' drove 'way out to your farm to see you; you did n't seem

to think what it meant to me to take that trip: but I c'n tell you 't it costs suthin' for a woman to do a thing like that; it cost me a good deal — it cost me fifty cents.' He went away then, 'n' he can marry Eliza Gringer if he likes, 'n' I 'll wish 'em both joy 'n' consider myself the luckiest o' the three."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

"'N' then there's Jathrop!" continued the speaker, suddenly transfixing her friend with a piercing glance, — "there's even Jathrop! under my feet night 'n' day. I declare to you 't upon my honor I ain't turned around four times out o' five this week without almost fallin' over Jathrop wantin' me to give him a chance to explain his feelin's. I don't wish to hurt *your* feelin's, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' it 's natural 't, seein' you can't help yourself, you look upon him 's better 'n' nothin', but still I will remark 't Jathrop 's the last straw on top o' my hump, 'n' this mornin' when I throwed out the dish-water 'n' hit him by accident jus' comin' in, my patience clean gin out. I did n't feel no manner o' sympathy over his soapy wetness,

'n' I spoke my mind right then 'n' there. 'Jathrop Lathrop,' I says to him, all forgettin' how big he 'd got 'n' only rememberin' what a bother he 's always been, 'Jathrop Lathrop, you let that soakin' be a lesson to you 'n' march right straight home this instant, 'n' 'f you want to think of me, think 't if I hear any more about your feelin's the feelin' you 'll have best cause to talk about 'll be the feelin' o' gettin' spanked.' "

Mrs. Lathrop sighed slightly.

Miss Clegg echoed the sigh.

"There never was a truer sayin' 'n' the one 't things goes by contraries," she continued presently. "Here I 've been figgerin' on bein' so happy married, 'n' instid o' that I find myself missin' father every few minutes. There was lots o' good about father, particular when he was asleep. I 'd got so used to his stayin' where I put him 't I don't know 's I c'd ever get used to a man 's could get about. 'F I wanted to talk, father was always there to listen, 'n' 'f he wanted to talk I c'd always go downstairs. He did n't never have but one button to keep sewed on 'n' no stockings to darn a *tall*. 'N' all the time

there was all them nice gover'ment bonds savin' up for me in his desk! No, I sha'n't consider no more as to gettin' married. While it looked discouragin' I hung on 'n' never give up hope, but I sh'd be showin' very little o' my natural share o' brains 'f I did n't know 's plain 's the moon above 't 'f I get to be eighty 'n' the fancy takes me I c'n easy get a husband any day with those bonds. While I could n't seem to lay hands on no man I was wild to have one — now 't I know I c'n have any man 't I fancy, I don't want no man a *tall*. It'll always be a pleasure to look back on my love-makin', 'n' I would n't be no woman 'f down in the bottom of my heart I was n't some pleased over havin' 's good 's had four offers inside o' the same week. But I might o' married, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' Heaven might o' seen fit to give me such a son 's he give you, 'n' 'f I had n't no other reason for remainin' single that alone 'd be s'fficient. After all, the Lord said 'It is not good for man to be alone,' but He left a woman free to use her common sense 'n' I sh'll use mine right now. I've folded up the pink nightgown, 'n' I'm

thinkin' very seriously o' givin' it to Amelia Fitch, 'n' I 'll speak out frank 'n' open 'n' tell her 'n' everybody else 't I don't envy no woman — not now 'n' not never."

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

II

MISS CLEGG'S ADOPTED

IT was an evening in early October, — one of those first frosty nights when a bright wood fire is so agreeable to contemplate and so more than agreeable to sit in front of. Susan Clegg sat in front of hers, and doubtless thoroughly appreciated its cheerful warmth, but it cannot be said that she took any time to contemplate it, for her gaze was altogether riveted upon the stocking which she was knitting, and which appeared — for the time being — to absorb completely that persevering energy which was the dominant note of her character.

But still the beauty and brilliancy of the leaping flames were not altogether lost upon an unseeing world, for there was another present beside Susan, and that other was full to overflowing with the power of silent admiration. Her little black beady eyes

stared at the dancing lights that leapt from each burning log in a species of rapt absorption, and it was only semi-occasionally that she turned them back upon the work which lay upon her lap. Mrs. Lathrop (for of course it was Mrs. Lathrop) was matching scraps for a "crazy" sofa-pillow, and there was something as touchingly characteristic in the calmness and deliberation of her matching as there was in the wild whirl which Susan's stocking received whenever that lady felt the moment had come to alter her needles. For Susan, when she knit, knit fast and furiously, whereas Mrs. Lathrop's main joy in relation to labor lay in the sensation that she was preparing to undertake it. The sofa-pillow had been conceived — some eighteen months before — as a crazy-quilt, but all of us who have entertained such friends unawares know that the size of their quilts depended wholly upon the wealth of our scrap-bags, and in the case of Mrs. Lathrop's friends their silk and satin resources had soon forced the reduction of her quilt into a sofa-pillow, and indeed the poor lady had during the first weeks felt a direful dread that the final result would be only a

pin-cushion. She had begun the task with the idea of keeping it for "pick-up" work, and during the eighteen months since its beginning she had picked it up so rarely that after a year and a half of "matching" it was not yet matched. It goes without saying that Miss Clegg had very little sympathy with her friend's fancy-work and despised the slowness of its progress, but her contempt had no effect whatever upon Mrs. Lathrop, whose friendship was of that quality the basis of which knows not the sensation of being shaken.

So the older woman sat before the fire, and sometimes stared long upon its glow, and sometimes thoughtfully drew two bits of silk from her bag and disposed them side by side to the end that she might calmly and dispassionately judge the advisability of joining them together forever, while the younger woman knit madly away without an instant's loss or a second's pause.

Mrs. Lathrop was thinking very seriously of pinning a green stripe to a yellow polka-dotted weave which had once formed part of Mrs. Macy's mother's christening-robe, when Susan opened her lips and addressed

her. The attack was so sudden that the proprietor of the crazy-work started violently and dropped the piece of the christening-robe; but the slight accident had no effect upon her friend.

"It does beat me, Mrs. Lathrop," she began, "how you can potter over that quilt year in and year out. I sh'd think you'd be so dead-sick o' the sight o' them pieces 't you'd be glad to dump the whole in the fire. I don't say but the idea is a nice one, an' you know 's well as I do that when they 're too frayed to wear every one 's nothin' but glad to save you their bonnet-strings, but all the same my own feelin' in the matter is 't a thing that ain't come to sewin' in two years ain't never goin' to come to bindin' in my lifetime, an' naturally that 'd leave you to finish your quilt some years after you was dead. I don't see how you 're goin' to get a quilt out o' them pieces anyhow. This town ain't give to choppin' up their silk in a way that 's likely to leave you many scraps, 'n' I know 's far 's I 'm concerned 't if I had any good silk I sh'd certainly save it to mend with, 'n' I 'm a rich woman too."

"I ain't tryin' for a quilt," said Mrs. Lathrop mildly, "I 'm only — "

"*Mrs. Lathrop*" — Susan's tone was emphatically outraged — "Mrs. Lathrop, do you mean to say that after all this givin' you ain't goin' to do your share? 'N' me lettin' you have the inside of the top of father's hat, 'n' Mrs. Fisher savin' you all her corners jus' on your simple askin'. You *said* a quilt, 'n' we give for a quilt, 'n' if you 've changed your mind I must say I want the inside o' the hat again to polish my parlor lookin'-glass with."

"I ain't got enough for the quilt," said Mrs. Lathrop; "it 's a sofa-pillow I 'm — "

"Oh," said Susan, much relieved, "well — I 'm glad to hear it. I could n't hardly believe it of you, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' yet if you can't believe what a person says of themselves who can you believe when it comes to talkin' about anybody? I 'm glad to know the truth, though, Mrs. Lathrop, for I was more upset 'n I showed at the notion o' losin' faith in you. You know what I think of you, 'n' I called you over to-night to ask your advice about suthin' as has been roamin' my head for a long time, 'n' you can mebbe

understand 's it did n't over-please me to have your first remark one as I could n't in reason approve of. A woman as 'll begin a quilt 'n' trade hen's eggs 'n' all but go aroun' town on her bended knees to get the old ties of other women's lawful husbands, jus' to give up in the end has got no advisin' stuff for me inside o' her. I would n't like to hurt your feelin's, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' as long as you say it 's a sofa-pillow o' course there 's no harm done, but still it *was* a shock 'n' I can't deny it."

Mrs. Lathrop appeared most regretful, withdrew her gaze from the fire and the yellow polka-dots and directed its entire volume at Susan.

The latter altered her needles with a fierce fling, and then continued:

"However, now 's all is made clear I will go on 'n' tell you what 's on my mind. I 'd be a fool not to tell you, havin' got you over here just for the purpose o' bein' told, 'n' yet I 've sat here a good hour — 'n' you know I ain't over-give to sittin', Mrs. Lathrop — tryin' to decide whether after all I would tell you or not. You see this subjeck is n't nowise new to me, but it 'll be new to

you, 'n' bein' new to you I can't see how anythin' 's goin' to be got out o' askin' you f'r advice. It ain't likely 't any one first go-off c'n think of things 't I ain't thought of already, 'n' you know yourself, Mrs. Lathrop, how little you ever have to say to me compared to what I say to you. Besides, 's far 's my observation 's extended no one don't ask f'r advice 'nless they 've pretty well made up their mind not to take it, if so be 's it suits 'em better untook, 'n' when I make up my mind I 'm goin' to do a thing anyhow so there ain't much use in me askin' you 'r anybody else what they think about it. A woman 's rich 's I be don't need to take no one else's say-so nohow — not 'nless she feels so inclined, 'n' the older I get the less I incline."

Mrs. Lathrop sighed slightly, but did not alter her position by a hair. Susan whirled her stocking, took a fresh breath, and went on:

"It 's a subjeck 't I 've been lookin' straight in the face, 's well 's upside down 'n' hind end to, f'r a good long time. I 'xpeck 't it 'll mebbe come in the nature of a surprise to the c'mmunity in general, 'n' yet, to tell

you the truth, Mrs. Lathrop, I was thinkin' o' this very thing away back las' spring when Mrs. Shores eloped. I was even thinkin' of it that very minute, f'r I was one o' them 's was in the square when Johnny come runnin' from the station with the telegram. Everybody 's see Johnny's face thought 's two trains had smashed on his a'count somewhere, 'n' I recolleck Mr. Kimball's sayin' 's he could n't 'a' looked more miserable 'f he'd been the man 's had run away with her. It was too bad you was n't there, Mrs. Lathrop, — Mrs. Macy always says 't she 'll regret to her dyin' day 's she thought o' comin' to town that mornin' to get the right time f'r her clock 'n' then decided to wait 'n' set it by the whistle. Gran'ma Mullins was there — she was *almost* in front o' Mr. Shores' store. I 've heard her say a hunderd times 't, give her three seconds more, 'n' she 'd 'a' been right in front; but she was takin' her time, 'n' so she jus' missed seein' Johnny hand in the telegram. I was standin' back to the band-stand, tellin' Mrs. Allen my receipt for cabbage pickle, so I never felt to blame myself none f'r not gettin' nearer quicker. The first thing I recolleck was I

says, ''N' then boil the vinegar again,' 'n' Mrs. Allen give a scream 'n' run. Then I turned 'n' see every one runnin', 'n' Mr. Shores in the lead. They do say 's he was so crazy 't first 't he seemed to think he c'd catch the Knoxville Express by tearin' across the square. But he give out afore he reached Judge Fitch's, 'n' Johnny 'n' Hiram Mullins had to carry him home. Well, it was a bad business at first, 'n' when she kidnapped the baby 't was worse. I was down in the square the day 't Johnny come with that telegram too. I remember Mrs. Macy 'n' me was the only ones there 'cause it was Monday. I was n't goin' to wash 'cause I only had a nightgown 'n' two aprons, 'n' the currants was ripe 'n' I 'd gone down to get my sugar, 'n' Johnny come kitin' up fr'm the station, 'n' Mrs. Macy 'n' me did n't put on no airs but just kited right after him. Mrs. Macy always says she learned to see the sense in Bible miracles that day, f'r she had n't run in years then, 'n' she's walked with a stick ever since, but she run that day, 'n' Johnny bein' tired 'n' Mrs. Macy 'n' me fresh — she was a little fresher 'n me f'r I 'd been talkin' — we all three come in on Mr. Shores

together. Seems like I c'n see him now. He sort of shivered all over 'n' says, 'Ah — a telegram!' 'n' Johnny says, 'Jus' come,' 'n' then we all waited. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I guess I've told you before how he jus' sort o' went right up in the air! — it said, 'We have took the child,' 'n' he bounced all over like a rat that ain't good caught 'n' then he out 'n' away 'n' we right after him. He kept hollerin', 'It's a lie — it's a lie,' but when he got home he found out 't Mrs. Shores had kep' her word 's usual. Mrs. Macy put cold water to his head 'n' I mixed mustard plasters 'n' put 'em on anywhere 't he was still enough, but all the same they had to lace him to the ironin' board that night. I hear lots o' folks says 's he 's never really knowed which end up he was walkin' since, but I guess there 's more reasons f'r that 'n her takin' the baby. My own view o' the matter is 't he misses his clerk full 's much 's he misses his family, f'r he 's got to tend both sides of the store at once 'n' he don't begin to be as spry 's that young feller was. He can't hop back 'n' forth over the counter like he used to; he 's got to go way back through the calicoes every time or else climb

up in the window-seat over that squirrel 't he keeps there in a cage advertisin' fur-lined mitts 'n' winter nuts. Mr. Kimball 's forever makin' one o' them famous jokes of his over him, 'n' sayin' 't he never looks across the square without he sees Shores tryin' to rise above his troubles 'n' his squirrel together, but I don't see nothin' funny in any of it myself. I think it 's no more 'n' what he might of 'xpected. He got the squirrel himself 'n' his wife too, 'n' she never did suit him. He was all put out at first over her takin' it so to heart 't he wore a wig, 'n' then he was clean disgusted over the baby 'cause he wanted a boy 't he could name after himself. They said he all but cried, 'n' she cried dreadful, f'r she did n't know nothin' about babies 'n' thought it was goin' to be bald always, jus' like him. But what did he marry for if he did n't want trouble? — That was what I said to the minister's wife. She come to call right in the first of it, 'n' I must say 't if she had n't come mebbe a good many things might o' been different, for my mind was about made up then, an' I was thinkin' very serious o' mebbe sayin' suthin' to you that very night. But she put me at

outs with the whole thing — not as I won't admit 't there ain't a difference between one 'n' nine, f'r any one c'n work *that* out on their fingers fast enough."

Mrs. Lathrop assented to this statement by moving her head in a slow acquiescent rhythm as she rocked.

"But her talk was certainly awful discouragin'. She was tryin' to speak o' Mr. Shores, but she kep' trailin' back to herself, 'n' when she said 't she'd never had time to crimp her hair since her weddin' day she jus' broke right down. I cheered her up all I could. I told her she could n't with a clear conscience blame any one but herself 'n' she 'd ought to say her prayers of gratitude 't she had n't got eight herself, same 's him. She sort o' choked 'n' said she could n't have eight 'cause she had n't been married but one year. 'Well,' I says, 'I don't see no great sense in that; he had eight the day he was married 's far 's that goes, did n't he?' She jus' rocked back 'n' forth 'n' said 't no one in the whole wide world had any notion how many eight children was till they turned aroun' from the altar 'n' see 'em strung out in the pew 's is saved for the family. I told

her 't as far 's my observation 'd 'xtended quite a number o' things looked different comin' down from the altar, 'n' it was in my heart to tell her 't if I 'd let any man get so much the better o' me 's to marry me, my self-respeck would certainly shut my mouth up tight afterwards. As long 's a woman 's single she 's top-dog in the fight 'n' can say what she pleases, but after she 's married a man she 'll keep still 'f she 's wise, 'n' the wiser she is the stiller she 'll keep, for there 's no sense in ever lettin' folks know how badly you 've been fooled. — But I did n't say all that to the minister's wife, for she did n't look like she had strength to listen, 'n' so I made her some tea instead. — 'N' *then* it come out 't after all what she come for was to borrow my clo'es-wringer! Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I certainly did n't have no blame f'r myself at feelin' some tempered under them circumstances, — me *so* sympathetic — 'n' the tea — 'n' all."

Mrs. Lathrop shook her head in calm and appreciative understanding.

"Did you lend — " she asked.

"— 'N' there are folks just like that in this world too," Susan continued, "'n' it

beats me what the Lord makes 'em so for, for they'll talk 'n' talk 'n' wander all over every subjeck in Creation to come 'n' never even begin to get around to the point till you 're clean gi'n out with listenin'. 'F the minister's wife had n't come that day 'n' had n't talked as she did, I might 'a' been left less wore out and, as a consequence, have told you that night what I ain't never told you yet, for it was strong in my mind then 'n' it 's strong in my mind now, 'n' bein' one o' them 's wastes no words, I 'll state to you at once, Mrs. Lathrop, 't before Mrs. Shores run away — 'n' after she run away too, f'r that matter — I was thinkin' very seriously o' adoptin' a baby."

"A — " said Mrs. Lathrop, opening her eyes somewhat.

"A baby," repeated Susan. "I feel you ought to be the first one to know it because, 's much 's I 'm out, you 'll naturally have the care of it the most of the time."

Mrs. Lathrop clawed feebly among her pieces and seemed somewhat bewildered as she clawed.

"Mrs. Shores' ba— " she queried.

Susan screamed.

"*Mrs. Lathrop!*" — she stopped knitting so that she might concentrate her entire strength into the extreme astonishment which she desired to render manifest in those two words — "Mrs. Lathrop! — Me! — adopt Mrs. Shores' baby! Adopt the baby of a woman as 'd gone off 'n' left it!"

Mrs. Lathrop looked deeply apologetic.

"I did n't know —" she ventured.

"Well, you 'd ought to of," said Susan, "'n' if you did n't I 'd never own to it. Such a idea never entered my head, 'n' I can't conceive when nor how it entered yours. Only I 'm free to confess to one thing, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' that is 't 'f *I* was give to havin' ideas 's senseless 's yours often are, I 'd certainly keep my mouth shut 'n' let people 's knows more do the talkin'."

Mrs. Lathrop swallowed the rebuke and remained passively overcome by the afterclap of her astonishment.

Susan began to knit again.

"I was n't thinkin' o' Mrs. Shores' baby 'n' I was n't thinkin' o' no baby in particular. I never said I was thinkin' of any baby — I said I was thinkin' of *a* baby. I sh'd think you could 'a' seen the difference, but

even if you can't see it there is a difference just the same. My sakes alive! it 's a serious enough matter decidin' to adopt some one for good 'n' all without hurryin' the doin' of it any. If you was 's rich 's I be, Mrs. Lathrop, you 'd understand that better. 'N' if you was 's rich 's I be, you might not be in no more of a hurry 'n I am. I ain't in a hurry a *tall.* I ain't in a hurry 'n' I don't mean to be in a hurry. I 'm only jus' a-gettin' on towards makin' up my mind."

Mrs. Lathrop slowly and meditatively drew a piece of sky-blue farmer's satin from her bag and looked at it absent-mindedly. Susan twirled her stocking and went on.

"'S long 's I 've begun I may 's well make a clean breast of the whole now. O' course you don't know nothin', Mrs. Lathrop, but, to put the whole thing in a shell, this adoptin' of a child 's a good deal to consider. When a woman 's married, it 's the Lord's will 'n' out o' the Bible 'n' to be took without no murmurin' 's to your own feelin's in the matter. Every one 's sorry for married people, no matter how their children turn out, because, good or bad, like

enough they done their best, 'n' if they did n't it was always the other one's fault; but there ain't no one goin' to lay themselves out to try 'n' smooth my child's thorns into a bed o' roses for me. Every one 's jus' goin' to up 'n' blame me right 'n' left, 'n' if it has a pug-nose or turns out bad I can't shoulder none of it onto the Lord, I 'll jus' have the whole c'mmunity sayin' I 've got myself 'n' no one else to thank. Now, when you know f'r sure 't you can't blame nobody else but jus' yourself, you go pretty slow, 'n' for that very reason I 'm thinkin' this subjeck well over afore I decide. There 's a good many questions to consider, — my mind 's got to be made up whether boy or girl 'n' age 'n' so forth afore I shall open my lips to a livin' soul."

Mrs. Lathrop appeared to be slowly recovering from the effects of her surprise.

"Would you take a small — " she asked, perhaps with some mental reference to the remark that dowered her with the occasional charge of the future adopted Clegg.

" Well, I d'n' know. That 's a very hard thing that comes up first of all every time 't I begin thinkin'. When most folks set

out to adopt a baby, the main idea seems to be to try 'n' get 'em so young 't they can't never say for sure's you ain't their mother."

Mrs. Lathrop nodded approval, mute but emphatic, of the wisdom of her friend's views.

"But I ain't got none o' that foolish sort o' notions in me. I would n't be its mother, 'n' 'f there was n't no one else to tell it so Mr. Kimball 'd rejoice to the first time I sent it down town alone. It's nigh to impossible to keep nothin' in the town with Mr. Kimball. A man f'rever talkin' like that 's bound to tell everythin' sooner or later, 'n' I never was one to set any great store o' faith on a talker. When I don't want the whole town to know 't I 'm layin' in rat-poison I buy of Shores, 'n' when I get a new dress I buy o' Kimball. I don't want my rats talked about 'n' I don't mind my dress. For which same reason I sh'll make no try 't foolin' my baby. I 'll be content if it cooes. I remember Mrs. Macy's sayin' once 't a baby was sweetest when it cooes, 'n' I don't want to miss nothin', 'n' we ain't never kep' doves for me to be dead-sick o' the noise, so I want the

cooin' age. I think it'll be pleasant comin' home days to hear the baby cooin', 'n' 'f it cooes too loud when I'm away you c'n always come over 'n' see if it's rolled anywhere. I c'n see that, generally speaking, it's a wise thing that folks jus' have to take 'em as they come, because when it's all for you to choose you want so much 't like 's not I can't be suited after all. It's goin' to be pretty hard decidin', 'n' when I've done decidin' it's goin' to be pretty hard findin' a baby that's all 't I've decided; 'n' then, *if* I find it, — then comes the raisin' of it, 'n' I espect that 'll be suthin' jus' awful."

"How was you goin' to find —" Mrs. Lathrop asked.

"Well, I've got to go to town to look at winter coats, 'n' I thought 't when I'd found what I wanted I'd jus' glance through two or three orphan asylums afore comin' home."

Mrs. Lathrop pinned the purple to the yellow and shut one eye so as to judge of the combination from the single standpoint of the other. She seemed to be gradually regaining her normal state of abnormal calmness.

"I thought 't your coat was pretty good," she said mildly, as Susan altered her needles. The stocking started violently.

"Pretty good! It's most new. My heavens alive, Mrs. Lathrop, don't you know 's well 's I do 't I ain't had my new coat but four years 'n' then only to church!"

"You *said* 't you was goin' to get—" Mrs. Lathrop remarked, unpinning the purple as she spoke and replacing it in the bag.

"*Mrs. Lathrop!* 'f you don't beat anythin' 't I ever saw for puttin' words 't I never even dreamed of into other folks's mouths! 'S if I should ever think o' buyin' a new coat 'n' the price-tag not even dirty on the inside o' mine yet! I never said 't I was goin' to buy a coat,—I never thought o' goin' to buy a coat,—what I did say was 't I was goin' to *look at* coats, an' the reason 't I 'm goin' to look at coats is because I 'm goin' to cut over the sleeves o' mine. I thought all last winter 't it was pretty queer for a woman 's rich 's I be to wear old-fashioned sleeves—more particularly so where I c'n easy cut a new sleeve crossways out o' the puffs o' the old ones. 'N' *that* 's why

I want to look at coats, Mrs. Lathrop, for I ain't in the habit o' settin' my shears in where I can't see my way out."

Mrs. Lathrop fingered a piece of rusty black silk and made no comment.

"When I get done lookin' at coats, lookin' 't orphans 'll be jus' a nice change. If I see any 't I think might suit I'll take their numbers 'n' come home 'n' see about decidin', 'n' if I don't see any 't I like I'll come home jus' the same."

The clock struck nine. Mrs. Lathrop rose and gathered up her bag of pieces.

"I mus' be goin' home," she said.

"I was thinkin' that very same thing," said Susan, rising also. "It's our thinkin' so much the same 't keeps us friends, I guess."

Mrs. Lathrop sought her shawl and departed.

It was about a week later that the trip to town took place. The day was chosen to suit the opening of a most unprecedented Fire-Sale. Miss Clegg thought that the latest styles in coat-sleeves were likely to bloom broadcast on so auspicious an occasion, and

Mrs. Lathrop herself was sufficiently infected by the advertising in the papers to dare to intrust her friend with the whole of a two-dollar bill to be judiciously invested if bargains should really run as wildly rife as was predicted.

Susan departed very early and did not get back till very late — so late in fact that her next-door neighbor had the time to become more than a little anxious as to the possibilities of some mischance having befallen her two-dollar bill.

But towards eight o'clock signs of life next door appeared to the anxious watcher in the Lathrop kitchen window, and one minute later she was on her way across. She found the front door, which was commonly open, to be uncommonly shut, and was forced to rap loudly and wait lengthily ere the survivor of the Fire-Sale came to let her in.

Then when the door did open the figure which appeared in the opening was such as to startle even the phlegmatically disposed chewer of clover.

" My heavens alive, Susan, whatever is the matter with — "

Susan backed faintly into the hall so as to allow the other to enter.

"I 'm worn to a frazzle — that 's all!" she said weakly and wearily.

They turned into the parlor, where the lamp was burning, and Mrs. Lathrop gave a little frightened scream:

"Susan! why, you look half — "

Miss Clegg collapsed at once heavily upon the haircloth-covered sofa.

"I guess you 'd better make me some tea," she suggested, and shut her eyes.

Mrs. Lathrop had no doubt whatever on the subject. Hurrying out to the kitchen, she brewed a cup of the strongest possible tea in the fewest possible moments, and brought it in to the traveller. The latter drank with satisfaction, then leaned back with a sigh.

"It was a auction!" she said in tones that gasped.

Mrs. Lathrop could restrain her anxiety no longer.

"Did you get anything with my — " she asked.

"Yes; it 's out in the hall with my shawl."

"What did —"

"It 's a parrot," said Susan.

"A parrot!" cried Mrs. Lathrop, betraying as much feeling as it was in her to feel.

"Without any head," Susan added wearily.

"Without any head!"

Then Miss Clegg straightened up in her seat and opened her eyes.

"There ain't no need o' bein' so surprised," she said in that peculiar tone with which one who has spent another's money always defends his purchase, — "it 's a stuffed parrot without any head."

"A stuffed parrot without any head!" Mrs. Lathrop repeated limply, and her tone was numb and indescribable.

"How much did it — " she asked after a minute.

"I bid it in for one dollar 'n' ninety-seven cents, — I was awful scared f'r fear it would go over your two dollars, an' it was n't nothin' that I 'd ever want, so I could n't 'a' taken it off your hands if it *had* gone over your money."

"I wonder what I can do with it," her neighbor said feebly.

"You must hang it in the window so high 't the head don't show."

"I thought you said it did n't have no head."

Miss Clegg quitted the sofa abruptly and came over to her own chair; the tea appeared to be beginning to take effect.

"It *has n't* got no head! If it had a head, where would be the sense in hangin' it high a *tall?* It 's your good luck, Mrs. Lathrop, 't it has n't got no head, for the man said 't if it had a head it would 'a' brought four or five dollars easy."

Mrs. Lathrop got up and went out into the hall to seek her parrot. When she brought it in and examined it by the light of the lamp, her expression became more than dubious.

"What did *you* get for your — " she asked at last.

"I did n't get nothin'. I did n't see nothin' 't I wanted, 'n' I learned long ago 't an auction 's generally a good place f'r buyin' things 't you don't want after you 've bought 'em. Now take that parrot o' yours! — I would n't have him 'f you was to offer him to me for a gift; not to speak o' his not

havin' no head, he looks to me like he had moths in him, — you look at him by daylight to-morrow 'n' see if it don't strike you so too."

Mrs. Lathrop was silent for a long time. Finally she said :

" Did you go to the Orphan Asylum ? "

" Well — no — I did n't. I would 'a' gone only I got on the wrong car 'n' ended in a cemetery instead. I had a nice time there, though, walkin' roun' 'n' readin' ages, an' jus' as I was goin' out I met a monument man 't had a place right outside the gate, 'n' he took me to look at his things, 'n' then I remembered father — two years dead 'n' not a stone on him yet ! "

Mrs. Lathrop laid the parrot aside with a heavy sigh and concentrated all her attention upon her friend's recital.

" The man was about 's pleasant a man 's ever I met. When I told him about father, he told me he took a interest in every word, whether I bought a monument of him or not. He said he 'd show me all he had 'n' welcome 'n' it was no trouble but a joy. Then he took me all through his shop 'n' the shed behind, 'n' really I never had a nicer

time. I see a lamb lyin' down first, 'n' I thought 't that would be nice f'r a little, but the further back we went the finer they got. The man wanted me to take a eagle grippin' a pen 'n' writin' father's name on a book 't he 's sittin' on to hold open while he writes. I told him 'f I bought any such monument I cert'nly would want the name somewhere else than up where no one but the eagle could read it. He said 't I could have the name below 'n' let the eagle be writin' 'Repose in Peace,' but I told him 't father died of paralysis after bein' in bed for twenty years 'n' that his idea o' Heaven was n't reposin' in peace, — he always looked forward to walkin' about 'n' bein' pretty lively there. Then the man said 't maybe suthin' simple would be more to my taste, 'n' he took me to where there was a pillow with a wreath of roses on it, but — my gracious, I 'd never be so mean 's to put a pillow anywhere near father after all them years in bed, 'n' as to the roses they 'd be jus' 's bad or worse, for you know yourself how they give him hay-fever so 's we had to dig up all the bushes years ago.

"But I 'll tell you, Mrs. Lathrop, what

I *did* see that nobody on the wide earth c'd help wishin' was on top o' their grave the minute they laid eyes on it. It's a lion — a weepin' lion — kind o' tryin' to wipe his eyes with one paw. I tell you I never saw nothin' one quarter so handsome over no one yet, 'n' if I was n't thinkin' o' adoptin' a child I 'd never rest until I 'd set that lion on top of father. But o' course, as it is, I can't even think how it might look there; the livin' has rights over the dead, 'n' my child can't go without the necessaries of life while my father gets a weepin' lion 't when you come right square down to it he ain't got no more use for 'n' a cat has for two tails. No, I 'm a rich woman, but all incomes has their outside fence. 'F a man 's got a million a year, he can't spend two million, 'n' I can't start in child raisin' 'n' tombstone father all in the same year. Father 'll have to wait, 'n' he got so used to it while he was alive 't he ought not to mind it much now he 's dead. But I give the man my address, 'n' he give me one o' his cards, 'n' when I go to the Orphan Asylum I may go back 'n' see him, an' maybe if I tell him about the baby he 'll reduce the lion some. The lion is

awful high — strikes me. He 's three hunderd dollars, but the man says that 's because his tail 's out o' the same block. I asked him if he could n't take the tail off, but he said 't that would hurt his reputation. He said 'f I 'd go up the ladder to his second floor 'n' look down on the lion I 'd never talk about sawin' off his tail, 'n' he said 't anyhow cuttin' it off would only make it cost more because it was cut on in the first place. I saw the sense o' that, 'n' I remembered, too, 't even 'f folks in the cemetery never can see the tail, father 'll have to look at it from higher up 'n the ladder to the monument man's shed, 'n' I don't want him to think 't I economized on the tail of his tombstone. I tell you what, Mrs. Lathrop, I cert'nly do want that lion, but I can't have it, so I 've decided not to think of it again. The man c'd see I wanted it, 'n' I c'd see 't he really wanted me to have it. He felt so kind o' sorry for me 't he said he 'd do me a weepin' fox for one hunderd 'n' fifty, if I wanted it, but I did n't want no fox. Father did n't have nothin' like a fox — his nose was broad 'n' kind o' flat. He had n't nothin' like a lion, neither, but I 'd

like to have the only lion in the cemetery ours."

Mrs. Lathrop nodded her head sympathetically.

Miss Clegg sighed and looked pensive for a moment, but it was soon over.

"'N' I've decided about my child too," she continued briskly, — "I've decided to have a boy. I decided goin' in on the train to-day. I'd been sorter thinkin' that I'd leave it to chance, but ordinary folks can't do no more 'n' that, 'n' where 's the good o' me bein' so open 'n' above-board 'f I dunno whether it 'll be a boy or girl, after all? I might 's well 's married the minister, 'n' Lord knows Mrs. Shores's troubles ought to be warnin' enough to no woman in this community not to marry no man, f'r one while, at any rate. If Mrs. Shores had n't married Mr. Shores, she c'd easy 'a' married his clerk when she fell in love with him. No woman that 's goin' to fall in love ever ought to begin by marryin' another man first. It mixes everythin' all up. But Mrs. Shores was a fool or she never would 'a' married him to begin with. I told him that the first time 't I see him after she was gone. I

thought 't if it was any comfort to him to know that there was one person in the c'mmunity 't looked on his wife as a fool he was welcome to the knowin'. So I told him, 'n' I used those very self-same words too, — 'n' I cert'nly did ache to tell him that he was jus' 's big a fool himself to 'a' ever married her, but I did n't think 't that would be jus' polite.

" But all that was right in the first of it — before she took the baby. I 'm free to confess 't I think he c'd 'a' stood anythin' 'f she had n't took the baby. It was the baby as used him all up. 'N' that seems kind o' queer too, for seems to me, 'f my wife run away, I 'd be glad to make a clean sweep o' her 'n' hers 'n' begin all afresh; I 'd never have no injunctions 'n' detectives drawin' wages for chasin' no wife 'n' baby 't left o' their own accord. But that 's jus' like a man, 'n' I must say 't I 'm dead glad 't no man ain't goin' to have no right to interfere with my child. I c'n take it 'n' go anywhere 't I please 'n' never be afraid o' any subpenny comin' down on me. 'S far 's I 'm concerned, I only wish 't she 'd send back 'n' abduct him too, 'n' then the com-

munity 'd have some peace on the Shores subjeck. There ain't nothin' left to say, 'n' every one keeps sayin' it over 'n' over from dawn to dark. I must say, Mrs. Lathrop, 't when I c'nsider how much folks still find to say o' Mrs. Shores 'n' it all, I 'm more 'n proud that I ain't never been one to say nothin' a *tall*."

Mrs. Lathrop did not speak for some time. Then she took up her parrot again and looked thoughtfully at its feet.

"What made you decide on a b— " she asked at last.

"I did n't decide. I c'u'd n't decide, 'n' so I shook a nickel for heads 'n' tails."

"'N' it came a boy."

"No, it came a girl, 'n' the minute 't I see 't it was a girl I knew 't I 'd wanted a boy all along, so, 's the good o' me bein' free to act 's I please is 't I do act 's I please, I decided then 'n' there on a boy."

Mrs. Lathrop turned the parrot over.

"'F you was so set on a boy, why did you —"

"What do folks ever toss up for? To decide. Tossin' up always shows you jus' how much you did n't want what you get.

Only, as a general thing, there 's some one else who does want it, an' they grab it 'n' you go empty-handed. The good o' me tossin' is I c'n always take either side o' the nickel after I 've tossed. I ain't nobody's fool — 'n' I never was — 'n' I never will be. But I guess I 've got to ask you to go home now, Mrs. Lathrop. I 've had a hard day 'n' I 'm 'most too tired to pay attention to what you say any longer. I want to get to bed 'n' to sleep, 'n' then to-morrow maybe I 'll feel like talkin' myself."

The third morning after Miss Clegg's trip to town she astonished her neighbor by tapping on the latter's kitchen window at the early hour of seven in the morning. Mrs. Lathrop was getting breakfast, and her surprise caused her to jump unduly.

"Well, *Susan!*" she said, opening the door, "what ever is the —"

"Matter! Nothin' ain't the matter, only I 've had a letter from the monument man. It come last night, 'n' the minister took it out o' the post-office 'n' sent it over by little 'Liza Em'ly when she come with the milk

this mornin'. I dunno whether to thank the minister for bein' so kind or whether to ask him to mind his own business. It's got 'Important' on the corner, 'n' sometimes I don't go to the post-office for two days at a time, but jus' the same it strikes me 't I ain't altogether in favor o' the minister's carryin' my mail home with him any time he feels so inclined. If I'd 'a' married him, I never 'd 'a' allowed him to interfere with my affairs, 'n' 's long 's I did n't marry him I don't see no good reason for his doin' so now."

Susan paused and looked at the letter which she held in her hand. Mrs. Lathrop slid one of the kitchen chairs up behind her, and she sat down, still looking at the letter.

"It's from the monument man," she said again, "'n' I don't know what ever I shall do about it, I'm sure."

Mrs. Lathrop was all attention.

"It's about the lion. He says 't he 's been 'n' took some black chalk 'n' marked around under him 'Sacred to the memory of Blank Clegg,' 'n' he says 't it looks so noble 't he 's had an offer for the monument

'n' he wants me to come in 'n' see it afore he sells it to — to some one else."

There was a short silence, broken at last by Mrs. Lathrop.

"Your father's name wa'n't 'Blank,'" she said; "it was 'Henry.'"

Susan knit her brows.

"I know, 'n' that's one thing 't 's been troublin' me. It's written out in good plain letters — 'Blank Clegg' — 'n' I've been tryin' 'n' tryin' to think what I could 'a' said to 'a' made him suppose 't it could 'a' been 'Blank.' That 'd be the last name in the wide world for anybody to name anybody else, I sh'd suppose, 'n' I can't see for the life o' me why that monument man sh'd 'a' hit on it for father. I 'm cert'nly mighty glad that he 's only marked it on in black chalk 'n' not chopped it out o' the bottom o' the lion. O' course 'f he 'd chopped it out I 'd 'a' had to 'a' taken it an' it 'd jus' made me the laughin'-stock o' the whole community. I know lots o' folks 't are plenty mean enough 's to say 't that lion was weepin' because I did n't know my own father's name."

Mrs. Lathrop looked sober.

"So I guess I 've got to go to town by to-day's ten o'clock. I ain't no intention o' takin' the lion, but I *shall* like to stand off a little ways 'n' look at the part o' the name 't 's spelt right. Later maybe I 'll visit a few asylums — I ain't sure. But anyway I thought I 'd jus' run over 'n' let you know 't I was goin', 'n' ask you if there 's anythin' 't I can get f'r you while I 'm in town."

"No, there is n't," said Mrs. Lathrop with great firmness.

Susan rose to go.

"I 'm thinkin' o' buyin' the Shores baby outfit," she said. "I guess Mr. Shores 'll be glad to sell it cheap. They say 't he can't bear to be reminded o' the baby, 'n' I don't well see what else the crib 'n' the baby carriage can remind him of."

"I wonder if the sewing-machine reminds him o' Mrs. Shores," said Mrs. Lathrop. "I 'd be glad to buy it if it did 'n' 'f he was wantin' to sell it cheap."

"I dunno why it sh'd remind him o' Mrs. Shores," said Susan; "she never sewed on it none. She never did nothin' 's far 's I c'd make out except to sit on the front porch 'n' talk to his clerk. My, but I sh'd

think he 'd hate the sight o' that front porch. If it c'd be got off, I 'd like to buy that of him too. My front porch 's awful old 'n' shaky 'n' I 'll need a good porch to wheel baby on. He c'd take my porch in part payment. It's bein' so old 'n' shaky would n't matter to him I don't suppose, for I 'll bet a dollar he 'll never let no other wife o' his sit out on no porch o' his, not 'ntil after he 's dead 'n' buried anyway ; 'n' as for sittin' on a porch himself, well, all is I know 't if it was me it 'd scorch my rockers."

" What time do you think 't you 'll get back ? " asked Mrs. Lathrop.

" I ain't sure. 'F I should get real interested huntin' orphans, I might stay until it was too dark to see 'em good. I can't tell nothin' about it, though. You 'd better watch for the light in the kitchen, 'n' when you see it burnin' I wish 't you 'd come right over."

Mrs. Lathrop agreed to this arrangement, and Miss Clegg went home to get ready for town.

She returned about five o'clock, and the mere general aspect of her approaching figure

betokened some doing or doings so well worthy of neighborly interest that Mrs. Lathrop left her bread in the oven and flew to satisfy her curiosity.

She found her friend warming her feet by the kitchen stove, and one look at her radiant countenance sufficed.

"You found a baby!"

Susan upraised supremely joyful eyes.

"No," she replied, "but I 've bought the weepin' lion!"

Mrs. Lathrop sat suddenly down.

"You never saw anythin' so grand in all your life! He rubbed the 'Blank' off with a wet cloth 'n' wrote in the 'Henry' with me standin' right there. I never see anythin' that went right through me that way before. Puttin' on 'Henry' seemed to bring the lion right into the family, an'—well, you can believe me or not jus' as you please, Mrs. Lathrop, but I up 'n' begin to cry right then 'n' there. The monument man made me sit down on a uncut block 'n' lean my back up against a No-Cross-no-Crown, 'n' while I sat there he chalked in father's birth 'n' death 'n' 'Erected by his devoted daughter Susan,' 'n' at that I stood right up

'n' said 't I 'd take it, 'n' it was n't no hasty decision, neither, f'r after I 'd made up my mind I could n't see no good reason for continuin' to sit there 'n' draw frost out o' granite 'n' into my shoulder-blades jus' for the looks o' the thing."

"But about the ba—" said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Oh, the baby 'll have to go. I told you all along 't it had to be one or t' other an' in the end it 's the lion as has come out on top. I guess I was n't cut out to be a mother like I was a daughter. I know 't I never wanted a baby for myself half like I 've wanted that lion for my dead 'n' gone father. Do you know, Mrs. Lathrop, I do believe 't I had a persentiment the first time I ever see that lion. Suthin' sort o' crep' right up my back, 'n' I 'm jus' sure 't folks 'll come from miles roun' to see it. I guess it 's the Finger o' Fate. When you come to think o' it, it 's all for the best jus' the way 't it 's come out. The baby 'd 'a' grown up an' gone off somewhere, an' the lion 'll stay right where you put him, for he 's so heavy that the monument man says we 'll have to drive piles all down aroun' father. Then, too, maybe I could n't 'a'

managed a boy an' I can scour that lion all I want to. 'N' I will scour him too, — nobody need n't suppose 't I 've paid three hunderd dollars f'r anythin' to let it get mossy. I 've invited the monument man 'n' his wife to come 'n' visit me while he 's gettin' the lion in place, 'n' he says he 's so pleased over me 'n' nobody else gettin' it 't he 's goin' to give me a paper sayin' 't when I die he 'll chop my date in f'r nothin'. I tell you what, Mrs. Lathrop, I certainly am glad 't I 've got the sense to know when I 'm well off, 'n' I cert'nly do feel that in this particular case I 'm mighty lucky. So all 's well 't ends well."

Mrs. Lathrop nodded.

III

JATHROP LATHROP'S COW

JATHROP LATHROP was just the style and build of young man to be easily persuaded into taking a kicking cow in full payment of a good debt. Jathrop having taken the cow, it naturally fell to the lot of his mother to milk her. The reader can quickly divine what event formed the third of these easily to be foreseen developments of the most eventful day in the life of the cow's new proprietor. The kicking cow kicked Jathrop Lathrop's mother, not out of any especial antipathy towards that most innocuous lady, but just because it was of a kicking nature and Mrs. Lathrop was temptingly kickable. The sad part of the matter was that Mrs. Lathrop was not only kickable but breakable as well. It followed that at twelve o'clock that noon Miss Clegg, returning from a hasty trip to the city, was

greeted at the depot by the sad tidings, and it was not until various of the town folk had finished their versions of the disaster that she was at last allowed to hasten to the bedside of her dear friend, whom she found not only in great bodily distress but also already cast in plaster.

Miss Clegg's attitude as she stood in the doorway was one of blended commiseration and disgust.

"Well, I never would 'a' believed it o' Jathrop!" she burst forth at last.

"'T wa'n't Jathrop," Mrs. Lathrop protested feebly; "it was the —"

"I know, but the cow never come of her own free will, 'n' it strikes me 't Jathrop 's the one to blame. I never was so done up in my life 's I was when I hear this about you. You kin believe me or not jus' 's you please, Mrs. Lathrop, but I was so nigh to struck dead 't I stopped short with one leg on the station 'n' the other on the train. It was Johnny 's dodged out o' the ticket-office to tell me the minute the train stopped, 'n' I d'n' know but I 'd be there yet — f'r I was clean struck all in a heap — only a man jus' behind jammed me with a

case o' beer 't he was bringin' home. To think 's I see you goin' to the barn jus' 's I was lookin' f'r a place to hide my keys afore leavin', 'n' then to think 's them was your last legs 'n' you usin' 'em 's innocent 's a grasshopper on a May mornin'! — I tell you I was so used up I thought some o' askin' to be druv up here, but Johnny did n't have no time to give pertickilers 'cause the telegraph begin to work jus' at that very minute 'n' he had to dodge back to see what they wanted to tick him about, so I see 't the wisest thing was to walk up 'n' find out f'r myself. Besides, you c'n understand 't if you was beyond hope I 'd be nothin' but foolish to pay a quarter to get to you in a hurry, 'n' I never was one to be foolish nor yet to waste quarters, 'n' so I come along through town, 'n' as a consequence I guess 't I know 's much 's you know yourself now."

Mrs. Lathrop looking duly inquisitive for details of her own accident, Miss Clegg advanced forthwith upon a seat and occupied it before beginning.

"I see Mrs. Macy first, 'n' she told me all as to how it happened. She says you

turned two back somersaults 'n' just missed squashin' the cat, 'n' 't young Dr. Brown told her 't if he had n't been so busy plantin' his garden to-day he certainly would 'a' felt 't it 'd 'a' been nothin' but right to diagnose you all over. Mrs. Macy says she ain't none too over-pleased 't the way he spoke, for, to her order o' thinkin', you had a pretty serious kick 'n' you 'd ought to realize it. She wanted me to ask you 'f he had you hang to the head-board while he give your leg a good hard jerk, 'cause she says 't that 's the only real safe way to make all the bones come back into place; she says 'f you ain't shattered you 're bound to come straight pervided the doctor jerks hard enough. She says they did her lame leg that way over thirty years ago, 'n' she says 't, sittin' down 'n' side by side, she 'd bet anything 't the minister 'n' all the deacons could n't pick out one from t' other. She says all her trouble comes when she walks. Nights 'n' rockin' she 'd never know she was lame herself."

Mrs. Lathrop looked slightly distressed.

"Gran'ma Mullins come up while we was talkin', 'n' she 's terrible upset over you.

She never had no lameness, she says; her trouble 's all in her ribs, — them ribs 't go from under your arms down. But she wants to know if you was put in plaster, 'n' she said f'r me to ask right off."

"Yes; I —" replied Mrs. Lathrop.

"Oh!" Susan's face darkened. "I declare, that 's too bad. 'N' young Dr. Brown 's gone now too. I see him 'n' Amelia drivin' out towards the Sperrits' while I was in the square. Well, if it 's on, it 's on, 'n' the Lord be with you, Mrs. Lathrop, f'r 'f Gran'ma Mullins says truth, no one else c'n help you now. You see, she told Mrs. Macy 'n' me what plaster is. It 's eatin', that 's what it is. Plaster 'll eat anythin' right up, hide, hair, 'n' all. She says don't you know how, when you smell a dead rat in the wall, you throw some plaster in on him, 'n' after a while you don't smell no more rat 'cause there ain't no more rat there to smell; the plaster 's eat him all up. She says you may laugh 'f you feel so inclined, but there ain't no such big difference between your leg 'n' a dead rat but what it 'll pay you to mark her words. She says 'f it don't do no more 'n eat the skin off it 'll still be pretty hard

for you to lay there without no skin 'n' feel the plaster goin' in more 'n' more. She says 't we all wish him well, 'n' yet no one in their right mind c'n deny as young Dr. Brown is n't old Dr. Carter, 'n' no amount o' well wishin' c'n ever make him so. She says 'f she was you she 'd never rest till old Dr. Carter 'd looked into that leg, f'r a leg is a leg, 'n' it says in the Bible 't if you lose your salt what 'll you salt with."

Mrs. Lathrop's distress deepened visibly.

"I tell you I was more 'n a little troubled over her words. Gran'ma Mullins ain't one to make up nothin', 'n' I know myself 't that 's true about the plaster. I 've eat up rats that way time 'n' again, — mice too, f'r that matter. It 'd be an awful thing f'r you to lay there peaceful 'n' happy till it come time f'r him to unwrap your leg 'n' then when he unwrapped have him find no leg in the centre. Nothin' 't he could say would help any — there you 'd be one leg gone forever. 'F it was your foot, it 'd all be different, f'r you could hop around right spry with a false foot, but I d'n' know what good your foot 'll do you with the leg in between

gone. I never hear o' no real foot on a false leg, 'n' 'f I was you, I certainly would n't want to lay wonderin' 'f I still had two legs f'r six weeks."

"Six weeks!" cried Mrs. Lathrop, with a start that collapsed at once into a groan; "must I lay —"

"Gran'ma Mullins says," pursued Susan, "'t the reason she knows so much about it all is 't she had a cousin with a broken leg once. It wa'n't no cow 's kicked him, jus' he was give to meditatin', 'n' while meditatin' durin' house-cleanin' he stepped down the wrong side o' the step-ladder. She says the doctor did n't so much 's dream o' plasterin' him up, he put splints on him, 'n' he come out fine, but she says he was suthin' jus' awful to take care of. They thought they could n't stand it the first weeks he was so terrible cross, but then his bones begin to knit, 'n' she says she hopes she may fall dead then 'n' there 'f she ever hear anythin' to equal that leg-knittin'. She said they was livin' so far out 't they could feel to leave him 'n' go to church Sunday, 'n' she says when they was comin' back they could hear him knittin' a good half-mile away."

"Dear, dear—" commented Mrs. Lathrop, giving a heave of unrest.

"Can you feel your leg now?" Susan inquired.

"Yes; I—"

"Then it's all right so far, but, my! you mus'n't begin gettin' restless this soon. You ain't been kicked six hours yet, 'n' you've got to lay that same way f'r six weeks. After a while it'll be pretty bad, I expeck, but you ain't got nothin' to complain of to-day. I see the minister just after I left Mrs. Macy, 'n' he said you must say to yourself, 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof' 'n' get along the best you can. I c'd see he was some put out over your gettin' a cow, f'r he c'd n't but understand 't with a cow over the fence I was n't goin' to be takin' milk from over the crick. He said 't your bein' kicked was a judgment 'n' the sins o' the parents should be visited on the children even unto the third 'n' fourth generation. I did n't know whose sins he was meanin', the cow's or Jathrop's, but I did n't ask. I guess we 'd ought to make allowances f'r the minister,—he ain't seemed to ever be able to bear up under

them twins. He was pushin' 'em in the carriage to-day 'n' drawin' little Jane after him in a express wagon. I asked him how his wife was, 'n' he said she 's doin' nicely, only she can't decide what to name the baby. He walked with me a piece; it seemed to do him good to speak out frank 'n' open, 'n' I guess he sees more 'n' more what a mistake he's made; he could n't but see it, I sh'd suppose, f'r his wife 's had four children in three years, 'n' I did n't even adopt one. It 's that four-in-three-years business 't seems to 'a' used him up the most. He says he never even had a idea 't it could be done. He says his first wife was so different, 'n' he says it 's just been shock after shock, 'n' two shocks when the twins come. Little Jane caught her dress in a wheel while we was talkin', 'n' we had to turn her 'n' the express-wagon both upside down 't once afore we could unwind it, 'n' while we was doin' that, one o' the twins fell out o' the carriage. The minister says he don't thank no man to talk race-suicide when he's aroun' ; he says his blood runs cold to think what his family 'll be at his silver weddin'. I tell you, Mrs. Lathrop, I will own 't I 've

always felt some sore at the minister on a'count o' his not marryin' me, but 'f I ever desired any species o' revenge I certainly 'd be hard to please 'f I didn't get it to-day when I see him with twins ahead 'n' little Jane behind 'n' nine at home."

Mrs. Lathrop sighed.

"That reminds me o' what I come over to ask you," said Susan. "Have you had any dinner?"

"No; I —"

"Then I 'll fix you some when I cook mine. I c'n call Jathrop 'n' have him bring it over when it 's ready. I see him in the yard when I come by; he was peekin' in at the cow. I ain't never had no great opinion o' Jathrop, but I guess he c'n carry a tray. 'N' now afore I leave you, Mrs. Lathrop, I will say jus' once more 's my advice is f'r you to keep a sharp eye on your leg, 'n' if it feels anyway like you can't feel nothin' I 'd have that plaster off in a jiffy. How's it put on? Round 'n' roun'?"

"He 's sent for the windin'," said Mrs. Lathrop weakly; "it 's jus' got some plaster 'n' a long piece o' tore sheet."

Susan moved towards the door.

"It beats me what ever made you go near the hind end o' that cow for," she remarked, pausing on the threshold. "Don't you know as it 's the hind end 's always does the kickin'? The front end can't do nothin' — 'nless it gores. Does she gore?"

"Oh, I d'n' know," wailed poor Mrs. Lathrop.

"I 'm goin'," said Miss Clegg, turning her back as she spoke. "You jus' lay still now 'n' think o' pleasant things. Nothin' else can't happen to you 'nless the house catches fire."

Then she went out and away.

It was late in the afternoon that Susan entered next door on her second visitation of mercy.

"Did you like your dinner?" she inquired, as she brought a rocker to where it would command a fine view of the bed and its occupant.

"Dinner! I ain't had no — "

Miss Clegg screamed.

"Ain't had no dinner! Why, I give it to Jathrop with my own hands. Everythin'

hot, 'n' the whole tucked up nice in the cloth 't I put over the bird-cage nights. I made the tea awful strong so 's to keep up your strength, 'n' there was a scramble o' eggs, 'n' one was fresh, I *know*. Whatever c'n he have done with it, do you suppose?"

"Maybe he ate —" Mrs. Lathrop began.

Her friend chopped her off with a second scream.

"Ate it! — Jathrop Lathrop! — Do you mean to tell me 't I 've been stewin' myself to feed Jathrop Lathrop! 'N' that good egg too. 'N' all my tea. I declare, but I am aggravated. The fire 's out now 'n' everythin' 's put away or I 'd go 'n' cook you suthin' else, but I 'd never trust that young man to carry it over."

"I ain't hun—" said Mrs. Lathrop.

"It 's certainly your good luck 'f you ain't. But to think o' him havin' the face to eat up your dinner! But he 's got the face f'r anythin'. 'F it was n't f'r hurtin' your feelin's, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'd jus' up 'n' tell you 't, to my order o' thinkin', Jathrop always did look more like a frog 'n he did like his own father, 'n' I 'll take my Bible oath 't I 've told Mrs. Macy that a

hunderd times. She says 't he ain't active enough to remind her o' no frog, but she always owns up 't his eyes 'n' mouth is like one. 'F I was talkin' to any one but you, I 'd say, spot him with green 'n' he could make you a nice livin' alongside o' the dog-faced boy in a Dime Museum, — 'n' never need to move. As a family, you ain't very lively anyhow, 'n' I ain't much surprised 't the cow 's gettin' out o' patience. She 's been trampin' aroun' 'n' mooin' a lot this last hour. The minister was walkin' by with six o' the childern, 'n' the childern come 'n' asked 'f they could see the cow 't kicked you. I did n't see no good reason why not, so we boosted 'em all up so 's they 'd have a good view o' her through the little window. The minister quoted 'Wild bulls o' Bashan' 'n' 'Muzzle not the ox 't treadeth out the corn,' 'n' I felt like askin' him 'f he did n't know a cow when he see one. She looked cross enough for any Bible talk, though, 'n' Rachel Rebecca was awful scared 'n' they all begin to cry. I took 'em into my kitchen 'n' give 'em a cooky apiece, 'n' that smoothed 'em out. The minister was real pleased; he quoted 'Even as ye did it unto the least

o' these, ye did it unto me,' so I took the hint 'n' give him a cooky too. They was goin' up to Mrs. Brown's to tea. I must say she 's pretty good to have six o' 'em all to once."

Mrs. Lathrop twisted wearily.

"C'n you feel your leg?" her friend asked anxiously.

"Yes, I c'n feel —"

"Mrs. Macy was up this afternoon. She says she 's more 'n' more worried over you. She says it is n't as she don't wish young Dr. Brown well, 'n' she 's intendin' to call him in sometime herself when she knows jus' what 's the matter with her 'n' jus' what she 'd ought to take for it, but she says 't in your circumstances there ain't a mite o' doubt but what you 'd ought to have old Dr. Carter 's fast 's he could be raked over here from Meadville. She says legs is scarce birds, 'n' you can't go lavishin' one on every young man 's is anxious to build up a practice on you. She says how do you know 's it 's a clean break 's you 've got there anyhow? Maybe it 's a fracture. A fracture 's when the bone splinters all to pieces 'n' fans out every way inside o' your leg. O' course young Dr.

Brown ain't got beyond clean breaks yet, 'n' if you 're splintered in place o' bein' clean you don't want him to learn the difference at your cost. If you lose your leg, Mrs. Lathrop, it certainly will be a awful thing for you. A woman can't ever say 's she was a brakeman or in the war, 'n' them 's the only good excuses 's can be give. Then, too, if you have a wooden leg 'n' the wind catches you at it, it 'll take you in a way 's 'll make you look more like a scarecrow 'n a Christian. Mrs. Macy says 't she was speakin' to Mr. Kimball about you, 'n' he was nigh to serious f'r once in his life. She says he says 't they take the hair off o' horse-hides with plaster 'n' that wooden legs is very hard to get comfortable. I s'pose the long 'n' short of it would be 't I 'd have to come over every mornin' 'n' hook it on to you, — 'f it was left to Jathrop he 'd probably have you half o' the time with your toes pointin' back 'n' your heel in front. C'n you feel it now?"

"Yes; I —"

"Then it 's still there, but, Lord! how that cow does kick 'n' pull 'n' moo! Why don't Jathrop do suthin' to her? She 'd

ought to be tended to. When you come right square down to it, she ain't no more to blame f'r kickin' you 'n' he is f'r lookin' like a frog. They was each made so. But even then she 'd ought to be milked jus' the same, 'n' Jathrop 'd ought to be settin' at it."

"I don't want — "

"It's got to be him or me or the butcher, 'n' I must say I don't see no good 'n' sufficient reason why it should be me. I did n't have Jathrop, nor yet the cow, 'n' I don't see why I sh'd lay myself open to bein' snapped off anywhere, jus' because your son 's half a fool — the head half."

Mrs. Lathrop groaned.

"Now there ain't no use in *that*," said Susan firmly; "lots o' things might be worse 'n they are. She might 'a' broken both your legs, or she may break both his when he tries to milk her to-night. You must look on the bright side, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' not twist aroun' like you 'd been in bed four weeks 'n' only had two more ahead o' you. The whole six is ahead now, 'n' instid o' wrigglin' 'n' sighin', you 'd ought to think how good it is as I 'm here to take care o'

you. I must say 't, to my order o' thinkin', your leg is goin' to be pretty nigh 's hard on me 's on you. 'F I can't trust Jathrop to so much 's carry a tray after I 've been to all the bother o' cookin' it, it stands to reason 's I must be kitin' with 'em all day long. I 'm very friendly with you, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' whether single or two-legged I 'd never but wish you well; still, I *am* a rich woman, 'n' bein' a rich woman, it does seem kind o' hard for me to have to slave back 'n' forth over the fence for six weeks; but, such bein' the case, it strikes me 't, of us two, you certainly ain't the one 's 'd ought to be doin' the groanin'."

Mrs. Lathrop appeared contrite and dumb.

"I guess I 'll go 'n' get supper now," said her visitor, rising; "when it 's got I 'll bring you over some. I ain't goin' to trust Jathrop with nothin' again, I know. To think o' his eatin' your dinner! I must say, Mrs. Lathrop, 't if you was cut out to be a mother, it certainly seems a pity 't you never got beyond Jathrop, for no one 's ever see him could believe it of you. However, I don't suppose 's any one in their senses

could blame you f'r stoppin' right off short when you see what you 'd gone 'n' done the first time."

Mrs. Lathrop made no attempt to reply. Miss Clegg left the room, and returned not until she came with the supper.

"I did n't see Jathrop nowhere," she announced as she entered, "but the cow 's goin' on jus' awful."

"Jathrop 's gone for the — "

"Well, I *am* glad. The butcher 's the only one 's 'd ought to go near her. I persume I c'd 'a' milked her, 'n' 'f she 'd been my cow I w'd 'a' milked her, but bein' 's she wa'n't mine I did n't see no good 'n' sufficient reason why I sh'd so much 's take a interest in her. I will own 't I did sorter ache to see her kick Jathrop into kingdom come, but the chances are 't he 'd 'a' come out alive, 'n' so it would n't 'a' paid in the end. I 'll be glad to hear her stop mooin', though. I was sick o' the noise afore she begun, 'n' she 's kep' right on ever since."

Mrs. Lathrop ate a little and drank a little, looking blandly non-committal as she did so. Miss Clegg rocked vigorously.

"I can't get that plaster out o' my head," she continued presently. "I wonder if it won't give you rheumatism anyhow. Deacon White got rheumatism from movin' into a house where the plaster was damp, 'n' it stands to reason it 'd be worse yet if it 's tied right tight to you. I must say 't I agree with Mrs. Macy; I think you 'd ought to have old Dr. Carter. O' course it 'll cost suthin' to have him over from Meadville, but it 'll cost you a sight more to have a wooden leg up from the city. There ain't no sense in tryin' to save money over a kick, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' what 's the good o' your economizin' all these years 'f you can't indulge yourself a little when you want to? That 's what Mr. Shores said to me — jus' them very self-same words — when he wanted to sell me that fancy green 'n' yellow parasol 's he had up f'r Easter. I did n't want no parasol, though; it had a pointed-nose dog f'r a handle, 'n' I did n't fancy myself goin' to church hangin' on to a dog's nose, even 'f it was silver-plated. I ain't no great admirer o' green 'n' yellow, neither, 'n' so I told him flat 'n' plain 't I wa'n't through my economizin' years yet. He sold the parasol to

Mrs. Jilkins, 'n' she let it down on her thumb 'n' come nigh to breakin' her thumb. She says she won't carry no parasol 's she can't shut down without riskin' her thumb 'n' she 's goin' to give it to her niece over to Meadville. She says her niece is awful womans-rightsy, 'n' can swing dumb-bells 'n' look over backward 't her own heels, 'n' that parasol 'll be nothin' but child's play to her. I ain't no sympathy with such views myself — I never was one as believed overmuch in womans' rights. My idea is to let the men have the rights, 'n' then they're satisfied to let you do 's you please. 'S far 's my observa— Lord have mercy on us!"

The cause of the abrupt termination of Miss Clegg's speech was a sudden crashing back of the house, followed by a rush and a swish at the side. The friendly visitor made one jump for the window, took one look out, and was off and away. The door slammed before Mrs. Lathrop got her mouth open to ask what was the matter. She called, but no answer came. Then she waited, and waited some more, and finally grew weary in her waiting and fell asleep.

She slept long and dreamlessly. It was well after seven when the noise of footsteps awakened her.

It was Susan. Having left the tray behind in her mad flight of the night before, she had come over with the teapot in one hand and a plate of toast in the other. But it was not the breakfast which attracted Mrs. Lathrop's attention, it was the expression of her neighbor's face. Tidings of vast importance were deeply imprinted there, and when Miss Clegg set the teapot down and said, "Well, Mrs. Lathrop!" there was that within the tone of her voice which seemed to cause the very air to quiver in anticipation.

"Is anything the — "

"Matter?" Susan put down the toast and drew herself up to her full height as she spoke. "Yes, Mrs. Lathrop, a good deal is the matter. You ain't seen Jathrop, have you?"

"No; where — "

"He 's gone!"

"Gone?"

"Gone. Mr. Weskin give him to understand as he 'd better go somewhere 'n' he

got on a train 'n' did it. If he had n't, he might 'a' been lynched."

"Lynched!" screamed the mother, sitting suddenly up. A direful cracking resounded under the bed-clothes as she did so, but in the excitement of the moment its possible evil portent went unnoticed.

"Lynched," repeated Susan; "that 's what I said, 'n' bein' 's I was brought up to speak the truth 'n' fear no man, you c'n depend upon its bein' so. But you must eat your breakfast, Mrs. Lathrop, — you must n't go without eatin' or you 'll lose your strength 'n' then blood poison 'll set in. 'N' that reminds me 't Mr. Weskin asked me yesterday if you 'd made your will. Have you?"

"No; but I want to know about —"

"He says you 'd ought to right off. He says there 's no tellin' where anythin' 'll end 'n' it 's wise to be prepared for the worst. He said he knowed a man as walked on a tack 'n' jus' called it a tack, 'n' first they had to cut off the tack 'n' then the toe 'n' then the foot, 'n' they kept on slicin' him higher 'n' higher till he died without no will a *tall*. I said you was n't no tack but a cow, but he said it was all one, 'n' I guess it is 's far 's

the lawyers go. I expeck it 'd be only a poor lawyer 's could n't argue a tack into a cow — 'n' out of her again, too, f'r that matter — 'n' Mr. Weskin ain't no poor — "

"But about Ja— "

" — Lawyer. He 's 's fine 's they make. O' course a good deal o' the time no one knows what he means, but that ain't nothin' ag'in' him, f'r I think with a lawyer you ginerally don't. It 's a part o' their business not to let no one know what they mean, f'r 'f law was simple no one 'd ever get fooled."

"'N' Jath— "

"He 's gone. You c'n make your mind easy about him, f'r he got away all safe. Hiram Mullins chased him clear to the station 'n' nigh to catched him, but there was a train jus' movin' out, 'n' Jathrop shinned up the little fire-escape on the back o' the calaboose 'n' was off. 'N' now 't he is gone, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'm goin' to right out plain 'n' tell you to your face 's it 's a good thing f'r you 's he *is* gone, 'n' you want to thank Heaven 's sent him to you 't that train was so handy to take him away ag'in."

"But what — " asked Mrs. Lathrop feebly.

"It was the cow," said Susan. "Don't you remember how I run last night? I hear a noise, 'n' my first thought was 's it was Jathrop or mebbe the butcher, but I got to the window jus' in time to see a tail make the turn o' the gate, 'n' the seein' the tail showed right off 's it warn't Jathrop nor yet the butcher. Seems 't Jathrop, not seein' no ring to tie her to, tied her to a spoke in the hay-rack 'n' in her mooin' she broke it. Seems't then she squose out into the chicken-coop 'n' then busted right through the wire nettin' 'n' set off. She run like wild fire, they say. She headed right f'r town 'n' down the main street. She come into the square lickety-split, 'n' the town committee was in the middle of it examinin' the band-stand where Judge Fitch says 't it shakes when he has to stamp 'n' pound in his speeches. She come on the committee so sudden 't they did n't even know what it was. She knocked Deacon White over on his back, 'n' threw Mr. Shores so hard ag'in' the waterin'-trough 't all his suspender tins come out before 'n' behind. Gran'ma Mullins was comin' across with six new teacups done up in each hand. Ed was comin' along after her with the

saucers, but she 'd told Mr. Kimball right out to his face as she would n't trust Ed with nothin' as had handles 'n' so she 'd carry them cups home herself. The cow hit her cornering, 'n' them cups 'n' her false teeth went all over the square. Some o' 'em hit Deacon White in the face where he lay gaspin', but the cow never stopped. She jus' flew. Mr. Fisher was hurryin' along to join the rest o' the committee 't the bandstand, 'n' he met her next. She lowered her head 'n' jus' gouged Mr. Fisher's three-quarters around him 'n' tore right on. She took the crick road, 'n' Polly Allen 'n' Sam Duruy was out walkin' 'n' see her pass. They say greased lightenin' was donkeys to the way she went. The minister 'n' the six childern was jus' comin' home from Mrs. Brown's, 'n' the five childern at home was all come runnin' to meet them. The cow charged right into the middle o' the bunch, 'n' the minister 'n' all them eleven childern is laid out f'r one spell.

"Well, 'n' even *then* she did n't stop. Seemed like ploughin' through the minister's family only give her fresh strength. She kept right straight on down the crick road,

'n' jus' by the ditch she come on Mr. 'n' Mrs. Jilkins. They was comin' up to town to spend the night with the Whites, 'n' they had the green 'n' yellow parasol all done up to send to Mrs. Jilkins' niece along with 'em. The cow was 's unexpected to them as to every one else, 'n' she hit the parasol right square in the middle. It broke, 'n' the wires all bust out 'n' punched Mr. Jilkins full o' holes afore he had time to point it at his wife. She got her share anyhow, though, f'r that dog's nose handle caught her right aroun' her leg 'n' throwed her head foremost into the ditch.

"'N' the cow did n't stop then! She rushed right along, 'n' on the first bridge was Mrs. Macy. She was standin' wonderin' what was to pay up the road, 'n' then she see it was a cow. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, you know what Mrs. Macy is on cows. I hear her say one day as she'd rather have a mouse run up her skirts any day 'n a cow. She told me 't she often go 'way round by Cherry Pond sooner 'n be alone with one in the road, 'n' such bein' the case, you can't suppose but what she was mortal scared. Her story is 's she only had time to see its

horns 'n' the wildness of its eyes afore she never *will* know what did possess her. She never see a cow that near in all her life before, 'n' she says 'f that 's the way they look face to, she ain't surprised 't folks sit a little back when milkin'. It was nigh to on to her, 'n' you know yourself 't the bridge is narrow 'n' Mrs. Macy ain't. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, you c'n believe me or not jus' 's you please, 'cause it 'll be Mrs. Macy 's you 'll be doubtin' anyhow, but this is what she says happened. The bridge is *here*, you know," Susan laid off the plan on her knee, "'n' the road is *here*. The cow was runnin' like mad along *here*, 'n' Mrs. Macy was white 'n' tremblin' so 't the whole bridge shook under her, right atop of it. She says to her dyin' day she 'll never see how she done it, but she jus' grabbed her skirts, spread 'em out wide 'n' said 'Shoo!' 's loud 's she could. Her story is 't the cow stopped, like she was struck dumb that second; then she reared up 's pretty a rear 's Mrs. Macy 'll ever ask to see, 'n' then she fell sideways into the mill-race. The water was on full 'n' she went right down 'n' into the mill-wheel, 'n' some of her caught in it 'n' she

could n't budge. It squinched her right up, 'n' she kicked some, 'n' mooed some, 'n' bust the wheel some, 'n' died.

" But Mrs. Macy wa'n't wastin' no time or words on the cow. She was walkin' 's fast 's she could along to where the nearest noise was comin' from.

" First she found Mr. Jilkins sittin' on a stump pickin' parasol out o' himself 'n' swearin' in a way 's Mrs. Macy hopes to be spared hereafter. While she was jus' bridge side o' him, Mrs. Jilkins come scramblin' up out o' the ditch madder 'n sixty-five hornets. Seems she 'd got most to the top twice, 'n' it was so slippery 't she'd slid clean back to the bottom again. Mrs. Macy says the Lord forgive her all her sins forever 'n' ever, 'f she ever see such a sight afore. She tried to wring her out in spots, but she was way beyond wringin'. Besides, Mrs. Macy says she ain't been a widow so long but what she see 't a glance 't they 'd be better 'n' happier without no third party by, 'n' so she left 'em 'n' went on to where the minister 'n' his family was feebly tryin' to put themselves together again. Polly Allen 'n' Sam was there helpin' 'em, 'n' Mrs. Allen was up on

the porch with the minister's wife. Seems 't was her first sittin' up, 'n' they 'd got her out in a rocker to see him come home jus' in time to see him run over. She took on awful 'cause she thought 't he was killed, sure, 'n' then when she found 't he was n't, the shock done her up completely. They had to put her straight back in bed, 'n' then they put the minister 'n his broken nose in with her 'n' went to work on the rest o' 'em. Sam Duruy got young Dr. Brown there 's quick 's he could, 'n' young Dr. Brown took off his coat 'n' rolled up his sleeves 'n' jus' went for 'em. He got the bandagin' 's was ordered for your leg, 'n' used it right up on the minister's family. He sent for all Shores' flaxseed 'n' all Kimball's cotton, 'n' then if he did n't pitch in! I was there by that time, 'n' we set Polly to fryin' poultices, 'n' Mrs. Macy 'n' me slapped 'em on hot. Sam was sent with the horse to get the doctor's darnin'-needles 'n' thread, 'n' young Dr. Brown told him to drive by the station 'n' tell Johnny to telegraph to Meadville f'r old Dr. Carter to come over 'n' help him 's fast as he could.

"Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I wish 't you could

'a' been there to see us. The water jus' streamed off Mrs. Macy 'n' me, 'n' I bet them poultices was hot, for no one never asked f'r a nother o' their own free will. Young Dr. Brown soon had to take off his vest, 'n' roll up his sleeves c'nsiderably more high, 'n' I will say 't beavers was nothin' to the way he worked. When he had the last one sewed off 'n' was ready to go, he looked like there was nothin' left 's he did n't know how to do. He brung me home in his buggy. I know it was pretty late, 'n' I never was no great hand to approve o' buggy-ridin' after dark, but he's married 'n' I thought 's no real harm could come o' it, so I up 'n' in. Mrs. Macy said she 'd stay all night 'n' sleep with 'Liza Em'ly 'n' Rachel Rebecca in the little half-bed. We come up along through town, 'n' I tell you I never see the square so gay any election night 's it was last night. Not a store was closed, 'n' Mr. Kimball was sellin' soda-water 't four cents a glass, with a small sheet o' court plaster throwed in at that. Dr. Brown stopped to go in back o' the fountain 'n' mix suthin' 't they keep there for him, 'n' it was then 's I hear about Jathrop.

"Seems 't along about 'n hour after the

cow 'd run over everybody, Jathrop come moonin' back from where the butcher lives out Cherry Pond way. Seems 't the sight o' his calmness jus' sort o' set every one 's was n't a wreck plum crazy. Seems 't when he asked what was up Deacon White shook his fist 't him 'n' said he was what 'd ought to be up — strung up, 'n' Hiram Mullins wanted to souse him in the waterin'-trough. Seems 't Hiram was mad 'cause he paid for them teeth o' Gran'ma Mullins, 'n' the tea-cups too. Well, it was pretty lively, 'n' the first thing any one knew Mr. Weskin drawed Jathrop off to one side to cross-examine him a little, 'n' Hiram see him start to run f'r the station. Hiram did n't waste no words findin' fault 't Lawyer Weskin's lettin' him go, but he went after him jus' jumpin'. He did n't catch him, though, 'n' so that 's the end o' Jathrop."

Miss Clegg paused, and drew a long, refreshing breath.

"I guess you 've had a nice breakfast," she said in a minute, "only you 'd ought to eat more."

"I did n't feel much — " said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Well, you 'd ought to. How 's your leg? C'n you feel it this mornin'?"

"Oh, yes, I c'n —"

"Then it 's all right so far. But I hear last night 's you c'n feel a leg even after it 's been cut off. Mrs. Macy says she heard of a man 's suffers awful yet in a leg as he lost in a planin'-mill over thirty years ago."

"My Lord alive!" cried Mrs. Lathrop.

"So you see you ain't sure whether your leg 's still there or not. However, I 've got to go, leg or no leg. I told Mrs. Macy I 'd be at the minister's at half-past eight to boil 'em all fresh 'n' I ain't got more 'n time to make it easy. I 'll be home to get you some dinner."

"I wish I knew where Ja— "

Susan stopped in the act of bending for the tray.

"Mrs. Lathrop! — Mrs. *Lathrop!* Do you mean to say 's you don't know a blessin' when it 's throwed right square in your face like yesterday? Jathrop 's gone, 'n' he can't never come back, 'n' if you had ten legs you 'd ought to yield the last one o' 'em up to Heaven without a murmur out o' sheer gratitude over his bein' took. Now you lay

still there 'n' don't even think such foolishness, or the Lord may lose his patience like the cow did hers, 'n' after feelin' 'n' seein' 'n' hearin' what a cow c'n do, I should n't feel noways inclined to rouse the Lord 'f I was you."

So saying, Susan took up her tray and left the room.

The morning was very long to the broken-legged one, who found herself quite unable to sleep under such circumstances. Her mind did not exactly race about among the startling developments of the past few hours, but it did dwell dubiously upon the more unfortunate phases of past, present, and (possible) future events.

She was glad beyond words when she heard Miss Clegg's step on the kitchen stoop about noon, and two minutes later Susan was occupying the rocker, and the repast which she had brought with her was beginning to occupy her friend.

" It 's jus' awful 's you can't get out," the visitor said sympathetically ; " you 're missin' things 's you 'll never have a chance to see

again — not 'f you live 's high 's Methusylem. The whole c'mmunity is in the square or else on the crick road. They 've got the minister laid out on the sofa, like he was a president, 'n' Polly Allen 's right there every minute to open the door 'n' keep the line a-movin'! Every one wants to see the minister 'n' every one wants to see the cow; so some goes for the minister first 'n' the cow later, 'n' others looks 't the cow first 'n' takes the minister in on the way back. They all stop one way or the other to look down at Mrs. Jilkins' clawin's on the side o' the ditch, 'n' they say the way she dug in the time she finally made it 's almost beyond belief. The minister says it 's nothin' but a joy to him to welcome his friends. He lays there 'n' quotes 'All thy waves 'n' billows went right over me,' 'n' smiles under his cotton, but Mr. Kimball says 'f he told the truth he 'd say 'Jathrop Lathrop's cow 's went right over me' instid.

"I must say 's the minister seems to be survivin' better 'n his wife. She says she thought 't the baby was the last straw, 'n' now here was a cow ten thousand times worse. She says bein' resigned is all right

'f you c'n be alone 'n' sit down in peace, but she 'd like to know how any one c'd resign themselves to a husband 'n' twelve childern all freshly stepped on. I told her 's the new baby had n't been touched, but she seemed beyond payin' attention to trifles like tellin' the truth.

"Young Dr. Brown 's awful anxious for some fresh cotton 'n' old Dr. Carter to get here from Meadville. He says he wants to dress Henry Ward Beecher's ear 'f anybody c'n ever catch Henry Ward Beecher. 'Liza Em'ly 's goin' around huggin' herself 'n' groanin' to beat the band, but young Dr. Brown says he can't do nothin' for her because there ain't no way to get in behind a rib 'n' pry it out to place again. I guess the truth o' the matter is 't he 's jus' plum tired out piecin' 'n' mendin'. It 's been a big job sewin' up after Jathrop's cow tore round like that. They say 's he had all of a foot to over-'n'-over along Mr. Fisher, 'n' Mr. Jilkins is jus' tufted like a sofa where he stopped up where he was skewered. Mrs. Jilkins is pretty hot yet over the parasol's bein' bust 'cause she 'd wrote her niece 's she was goin' to give it to her 'n' her niece

's bought a hat with yellow buttercups 'n' green leaves jus' to match it. But I 'll tell you who 's in a sad way, — it 's poor Gran'ma Mullins. From the first second 's they got her right end up again she begin to ask suthin', 'n' on a'count o' her teeth bein' gone no one could make out what it was. Hiram did n't get no sleep all night with her sighin' 'n' mumblin', 'n' towards mornin' he made out 's she was wantin' to know 'f Mr. Kimball 'd replace them cups 's the cow smashed. Hiram went right after breakfast 'n' asked, 'n' Mr. Kimball said not on Hiram's tin-type he would n't. He said Gran'ma Mullins was carryin' 'em herself sooner 'n trust Ed, 'n' he wa'n't to blame f'r such wild animals 's might naturally fancy takin' after her. They tried to console her by lettin' her see her teeth get put in a mustard box to go to the city to be mended, but the worst of it is 's two of the teeth can't be found in the square, 'n' Deacon White thinks he swallowed 'em when he laid there gaspin' so wide open. He says he never knowed such queer feelin's 's he had las' night. Mrs. Fisher was there, 'n' she said 'f Deacon White was bothered 's to how to

act with them teeth he only needed to go 'n' consult Mr. Fisher 'cause there 's nothin' in the wide world 's Mr. Fisher ain't sure 't he knows more about 'n any one else. She says Mr. Fisher ain't a bit suited 't the way young Dr. Brown brought his edges together, 'n' she says he says 't jus' as soon 's he ain't so stiff 'n' sore about leanin' over he 's goin' to take all them stitches out 'n' sew himself up the way 't he 'd ought to be sewed."

Mrs. Lathrop turned a little in bed. Again the cracking noise might be heard, but neither one of the friends had mental leisure to notice it.

"Mr. Weskin stopped me on my way home," Susan continued, "'n' asked me what steps you was intendin' to take in regard to the lawsuits for damages —"

"Damages!" cried Mrs. Lathrop in great fright.

"Yes, your cow's damages."

"*My* cow! I did n't have nothin' to do with her except get kicked by —"

"I know, but Mr. Weskin explained all that to me. Jathrop 's gone nobody knows where, 'n' so you come next. 'F he 's

proved dead leavin' property it 'd be yours, 'n' if he leaves damage-suits you inherit 'em jus' the same."

"My heavens!"

"Mr. Weskin says that 's how it is, 'n' he mus' know. I 've always had a great respeck for what Mr. Weskin knows ever since he went into court 'n' proved 's the mill 's the other side o' the crick from where it is, jus' by havin' Hiram Mullins 'n' Sam Duruy stand up 'n' swear the mill-race run 'round behind it. I never could see how he done it, but I never felt to blame myself none f'r that, 'cause it takes another lawyer to see what a lawyer 's doin' anyhow. When a lawyer says anythin' 's so to me, I never take no time to disbelieve him 'cause 'f he wa'n't able to prove the truth o' his own lyin' he 'd never get to be in the law a *tall*. On the other hand, though, I don't trust him none, even if I ain't a mite o' doubt as to what he says. Believin' is cheap, you c'n believe the whole Bible 'n' it won't cost a cent 'n' is suthin' to your credit; but trustin' live folks is always expensive. 'F Lawyer Weskin says 's you c'n be sued, you 're pretty safe to feel it 's so

— the more so 's it was him 's sent Jathrop off so slick. But I ain't so sure 't I 'd sit down 'n' let him sue me 'f I was you. He c'n sue, from now on, but it 's for you to c'nsider whether he gets anythin' but fun out o' it or not. 'F you 're willin' to be sued, it 's ownin' you know you 've done suthin', 'n' you ain't done nothin' — it was the cow 's did it to you. There ain't nothin' to be gained f'r even the wicked by ownin' up to bein' wicked in court, 'n' they often get off by ownin' up to bein' innocent. You can't never lose nothin' by swearin' 's it wa'n't you, 'n' 's far as my observation 's extended, a person 's starts out by tryin' to be honest 'n' sayin', 'Yes, I done it,' soon finds themselves with the whole neighborhood laid at their door 'n' never no thanks for it, neither.

"Mr. Weskin says 't Deacon White says 't some one 's got to pay him f'r happenin' to swallow Gran'ma Mullins' teeth when he wa'n't thinkin'. Well, 'f he 's got a right to anythin', pretty nigh all the c'mmunity 's got a equal right. There 's Mr. Fisher with a slice out o' his side, 'n' them nine teacups o' Gran'ma Mullins'. There 's Mr. Jilkins goin' to set a price for every par-

asol punch he got, 'n' Mrs. Jilkins goin' to want a new parasol.

"'N' then it 'd be jus' like young Dr. Brown to perk up 'n' send you a bill, instid o' bein' everlastin'ly grateful for all the teachin' he owes straight to you. He 's had a chance to perform 'most every kind o' operation 'n' to use up the last drop o' all his old liniments jus' as a result o' that one cow. Then too he 's had a chance to call old Dr. Carter over in consultation, 'n' in the ordinary run o' things he could n't o' 'xpected to have nothin' to consult about f'r years 'n' years. He 's a made young man 'n' all in one night, jus' owin' to you, 'n' the last time he whipped his horse through the square to-day, Mr. Kimball said he looked so busy 't he supposed they 'd elect him our next mayor.

"You was n't responsible f'r the cow's gettin', 'n' Jathrop was. It 's Jathrop 's is to blame, 'n' if any one 's to be sued it 'd ought to be him, 'n' he ain't got no property but the cow, 'n' she 's hung up dead 'n' her own damage, so it 's no use suin' him f'r anythin'. Folks 's ain't got nothin' don't never have any law troubles, 'n' Jathrop is gone off 'n'

so he 's specially handy to blame for everythin'. 'S far 's my observation 's 'xtended, it 's always folks a long ways off 's it 's wisest to lay all the faults to, 'n' 'f I was you —"

Mrs. Lathrop's eyes suddenly started out of her head.

"I can't feel my leg!" she cried.

Susan sprang to her feet.

"It 's the plaster!" she exclaimed; then, starting towards the door, "I 'll run 'n' get the axe 'n' hack you right out."

"No — no," screamed Mrs. Lathrop, "not the axe."

"Then I 'll bring up the teakettle 'n' pour boilin' water on it till it softens 'n' comes off."

"No, I don't want —"

"Well, Mrs. Lathrop," — Susan looked her disapproval, — "seems to me you 're jus' a little fussy. I must say if you ain't willin' to have it broke off or soaked off, I can't well see how it 's goin' to be got off."

Mrs. Lathrop bunched herself somewhat, and a grating and powdering noise resulted.

"I drew it right up!" she cried joyfully.

Susan's expression became enigmatic.

Mrs. Lathrop manœuvred further.

"I straightened it out!" she announced further.

Miss Clegg approached the bed.

"I don't believe 's it was ever broke," she said in deep disgust.

"Dr. Brown said he wa'n't sure," the invalid continued, elongating and contracting herself, caterpillar-like,' "he said 's he 'd wait the windin' — "

"Mrs. Lathrop," said Susan suddenly, "I 've jus' thought! It 's this afternoon 's the butcher 'n' the man 's mends church spires 's comin' together to get the cow out o' the mill-wheel. The whole c'mmunity 's goin' down to look on, 'n' I can't see no good 'n' s'fficient reason why you should n't go too. I 'll help you dress, 'n' we 'll scurry along right now. 'F we meet Mr. Weskin 'n' he says lawsuit to you, you jus' up 'n' tell him 's you 're goin' to sue him for throwin' you head foremost into a fever on a'count o' not knowin' where your only son 's been gone all night, 'n' 'f young Dr. Brown *ever* has the face to so much 's hint at a bill, you jus' out 'n' ask him 'f he knows a whole leg when he sees one, 'n'

if he don't answer, say 't you 've got two in spite o' his plaster. There 's always a way out o' anythin' 'f a person only don't try to think it out, but jus' speaks up sharp 'n' decided. Come on 'n' get up now, 'n' I 'll help you hurry, 'n' your leg won't miss nothin' after all."

Mrs. Lathrop got out of bed at once.

IV

SUSAN CLEGG'S COUSIN MARION

MRS. LATHROP was of a placid disposition, and not inclined towards even that species of mental activity which a more than usual amount of astonishment demands. Therefore when she saw Susan going out one very rainy day she merely wondered where her energetic neighbor was going, and when, an hour later, she observed the same lady returning, she continued her usual trend of thought by the mildest possible further development of a species of curiosity as to where she had been.

Miss Clegg perceived the interested gaze directed towards her out of the kitchen window and decided to go in next door for a little visit. To that end she passed her own gate, entered Mrs. Lathrop's, proceeded up the front walk, stacked her drip-

ping umbrella against one of the piazza posts, carefully disposed her rubbers beside the umbrella, and then entered the house.

She found Mrs. Lathrop seated in the kitchen.

"Why," said that lady, "I thought you was gone on up to see —"

"No," said the visitor, "I was to see her last week and I sha'n't go again for one while. Mrs. Brown 'n' me has been friends 'n' good friends for too many years to break off sudden, but still I never 'xpected 's she'd be one to try a new receipt on me 'n' never give me my choice 's to whether I 'd risk it or not until a good fifteen minutes after I 'd swallowed the last bite. I can't feel anythin' but bitter still when I think of yesterday 'n' last night. I was sittin' there 's innocent 's a mule eatin' thistles, 'n' all of a sudden I felt to say, 'Mrs. Brown, did you put bakin' powder or yeast in that cake?' It was then 's she told me 't she 'd up 'n' made it with suthin' 's a peddler throwed in at the door. 'Where 's the label?' I says, puttin' my hand to where I felt the most need o' knowin' what in creation to come I had got in me. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, 'f she had n't burned up the

label; so there was nothin' f'r me to do but go home 'n' come nigh to dyin' of I did n't know what. I 've got a book, 'The Handy Family Friend,' 's tells what you 'd ought to take after you 've took anythin', 'n' I read it 'way through to see 'f there was any rule f'r when you don't know what you 've took, but there wa'n't no directions, 'n' so I jus' calmly spent the night hoppin' about like mad, 'n' I 'm free to confess 't there 'll be a coolness in my feelin's towards Mrs. Brown henceforth. I ain't said nothin' direct to her herself, but I spoke my full mind to Mrs. Macy, 'n' Mrs. Macy give me to understand 's she should let Mrs. Brown know my sufferin's, 'n' I mentioned to Mr. Kimball 's I felt some hurt over bein' pierced to the core with cake 's nobody knowed what had raised it, 'n', although he laughed 'n' said mebbe Cain raised it, still I feel he 's safe to tell every one in town. I want 's every one sh'd know it. I consider 't when a woman goes to see another woman she 's unsuspectin' o' any new species o' cake-raisin', 'n' 'f there is any new species in the wind my view o' the matter is 's it 'd ought to be tried on somebody else 'n' not on me."

Miss Clegg stopped and shook her head hard.

"Where have you — " began Mrs. Lathrop.

"Oh, that reminds me," said the caller with a sudden start. She paused a second, as if to gather force for the proper delivery of her next speech; a wondrous glow of unconscious but exalted triumph rose to her visage. "I went," she announced, her voice high-keyed with confidence as to what was about to fall upon the totally unprepared placidity of the unsuspecting Mrs. Lathrop, — "I went to post a letter to Cousin Marion!"

Mrs. Lathrop's jaw dropped. A sudden and complete paralysis of all her faculties seemed to be the immediate effect of her friend's astounding communication.

For a full half-minute there was silence in the kitchen while Susan rocked and enjoyed the sight of the havoc wrought by her speech.

But at last Mrs. Lathrop gathered some fragments out of the wreck of her sensibilities and said feebly, —

"Why, Susan, I never hear as you had one single — "

"Nor me, neither," said the caller, — and

then the sluice-gates opened, and the stream swept through and madly on again, — "nor me, neither, Mrs. Lathrop. I never even dreamed o' any such goin's on, 'n' I c'n assure you 's the shock 's come 's heavy on me 's on you. I went up garret this mornin' 's innocent 's a babe whose mother 's yet unborn, 'n' there I found her."

"In the garret!" cried Mrs. Lathrop.

Miss Clegg drew a long breath.

"In a trunk. 'N' jus' 's unexpected 's the comin' o' Judgment Day. Mrs. Lathrop, you c'n believe me or not jus' 's you please, but I give you my Gospel word of honor as when I turned down the flap o' a trunk 'n' see that old mousey letter stuck in it cornerways, I no more thought o' findin' a cousin than I did o' findin' a moth, 'n' *you* know how scarce moths is with me; I ain't so much 's seen one 'xcept on your side o' the house in twenty years, I do believe. 'N' I could n't in conscience say 's I was pleased when I did see the letter, f'r I thought 's like 's not it was a bill, 'n' anyhow I wa'n't inclined to be over-pleased at anythin' this mornin' — I persume you saw how the minister come in on me?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Lathrop, "I see him. What —"

"Wanted to name the baby after me, 'n' I call it a pretty time to come namin' a baby when a woman has got one leg on a ladder 'n' her head tied up for bats. I thought he was the tin-peddler from Meadville, 'n' I run f'r my rag-bag, 'n' then there it was only the minister after all! Well, I was n't pleased a *tall*, 'n' I did n't ask him in, neither. I stood fair 'n' square in the doorway, 'n' 'f he was 'xpectin' to see me look happy over havin' a compliment paid me, 't was one more time 's he did n't get what he 'xpected. That was what he called it, — 'payin' me a compliment,' — 'n' I mus' say 's it struck me 's pretty high-flown language f'r jus' simply wantin' to name a thirteenth baby after the richest woman in the c'mmunity. Seems to me thirteen was a good many to wait afore thinkin' o' me anyhow, 'n' I ain't noways sure 's I want a thirteenth baby named after me anyway. I never was foolish like some folks, 'n' you know *that* 's well 's I do, Mrs. Lathrop, but still you know, too, 's it 's never nothin' but safe to keep away fr'm the under side o' ladders 'n' the

number thirteen. I've heard Gran'ma Mullins tell a dozen times 's how 'f she'd never 'a' gone picnickin' on twice thirteen — that's twenty-six — o' July she'd never 'a' met her husband, 'n' might o' married Deacon White. They was both after her, 'n' she picked out the wrong one, 'n' first he went to the war 'n' then he went to the dogs, 'n' now there she is in a four-room cottage 'n' Deacon White's wife orderin' a patent ice-box out o' a catalogue 'n' him never sayin' a word. She c'd 'a' took a world o' comfort with his daughter, 'n' I don't believe she takes none to speak o' with Hiram, 'n' anyway I was clean put out with the minister afore I even see him, f'r I can't abide that way he 'n' his wife 's both got o' talkin' 'n' talkin' 'n' never gettin' aroun' to sayin' what they set out to. I like folks 's is right quick 'n' sharp, 'n' these roamin', meanderin' kind o' everlastin' talkers ain't my idea a *tall.* 'N' I 'm free to confess 's I did get some tempered to-day standin' there listenin' to what did n't interest me no more 'n a pussy-willow, 'n' me wild to be rootin' up garret all the time.

"O' course he had to tell me all about

the baby, 'n' how Felicia Hemans is jus' come to the silly readin' age 'n' 's wild to name it Brunhilde. Seems 's Felicia Hemans is out for Brunhilde 'n' the minister 's out f'r me. I never hear o' no Brunhilde, 'n' I up 'n' told the minister so to his face. 'Who is she anyhow?' I says, flat 'n' plain, for Lord knows 'f he 'd found a rich relation I wanted my old flannels for cleanin' cloths hereafter. But he 'xplained 's Felicia Hemans got Brunhilde out o' a book — the Nibble suthin' 'r other. 'Oh, well,' I says, 'if you c'n be suited with namin' your family after rats 'n' mice I guess you c'n leave me out,' I says, 'n' I kind o' backed off so 's to try 'n' set him a-goin', but he stood still, 'n' o' course no true Christian c'n shut her door in her minister's face — even 'f she *is* stark crazy to get to cleanin' her garret. 'Why don't you name her Minnie after yourself?' I says (Minister, you know), but I c'd see 't he did n't take to that a *tall*. 'Oh, well,' I says then, feelin' 't I must get rid o' him somehow, 'name her after me 'f you want to 'n' I 'll give her — ' 'n' I was jus' goin' to say 'my blessin',' 'n' such a look come over his face 'n' — well, Mrs. Lathrop,

maybe I 'm too tender-hearted f'r my own good, but I jus' had the feelin' 't I c'd 's easy pull the legs off o' a live fly 's to disapp'int that face, 'n' so I says 'a dollar' right off quick before I really thought. 'N' what do you think? — what *do* you think? 'F you 'll believe me he did n't look overly pleased, 'n' at that I *did* warm up a little. You don't 'xpect much of a minister, 'n' I think as a general rule 't we 're pretty patient with ours, but you *do* 'xpect gratitude, 'n' a dollar 's a dollar, 'n' considerin' the garret into the bargain, I felt my temper comin' pretty high, 'n' I jus' out with what I 'd been thinkin' all along 'n' I spoke the truth flat 'n' plain right to his face. 'I d'n' know,' I says, 'why I sh'd be 'xpected to give your baby more 'n a dollar. She ain't *my* baby, 'n' you know 's well 's I do where the blame f'r *that* lies,' 'n' then I banged the door in his face. Maybe it was n't jus' the proper thing to do, but 'f ever a woman had no need for a minister it was me this mornin'."

Susan paused, and Mrs. Lathrop seized the chance to interpose a question.

"'N' about your cousin —"

But Miss Clegg was already started again.

"I do get so aggravated when I think about the minister," she went on. "I was sayin' to Mrs. Macy yesterday 's it does seem 's 'f I have harder work keepin' on smilin' terms with my own minister 'n' even a Job might in reason look for. I would n't be no woman 'f I had n't shown some feelin' over the way 't he went about town tellin' right 'n' left how nice them stockin's o' mine fit him after they shrunk too small f'r me, 'n' yet I ain't a mite o' doubt but what, a'cordin' to the Bible, I 'd ought to 'a' forgive him 'n' turned the other cheek into the bargain. Mrs. Craig says 's Mr. Kimball ain't mincin' matters none, but is jus' statin' all over 's it 's all on a'count o' my havin' bought the wool o' Shores; she says 't he says 't if I 'd bought it o' him I 'd be wearin' all four pair this very day. She says 's Mrs. Fisher says 's he told her 't, seein' things is 's they is, he 's lookin' to see them stockin's keep right on shrinkin' down through the minister's family until they end up 's socks on the thirteenth baby. A joke 's a joke, 'n' I c'n see the p'int o' a good joke 's quick 's any one, but I mus' say I fail to see any fun in such a remark. 'S far 's my observation 's 'xtended, there

ain't nothin' ladylike in the minister's wearin' my stockin's, nor yet in Mr. Kimball's entertainin' the whole c'mmunity with 'em. A'cordin' to my manner o' thinkin', a woman as 'll give away four pair o' brand-new hand-knit stockin's for no better reason 'n 't the heels shrunk down under her instep, is doin' a deed o' Christian charity instead o' layin' herself open to all manner o' fun-makin'. 'N' I ain't the only one 's views the thing so serious, either, for Mr. Shores feels jus' 's bad 's I do about it. He come runnin' to catch me the other day, 'n' asked me 'f I had n't mebbe used cold water for the first washin'. I did n't feel to thank him none f'r his interest afore he opened his mouth, but I c'n assure you, Mrs. Lathrop, 't after he 'd spoke I jus' stood there plum-petrified 'n' stock-starin' f'r 's much 's a minute afore I c'd get voice to ask who give *him* the authority to teach me how to wash my own stockin's. 'N' then, when I *did* speak, I made no bones 's to sayin' jus' what I thought. I never was one to give my opinion o' anythin' or anybody aroun' free, but I certainly did feel to be open at Mr. Shores. I told him 's shrunk stockin's

to my order o' thinkin' was a species o' spilt milk 's knowed no turnin', 'n' I further told him 't I 'd take it 's a great kindness 'f he 'n' the rest o' the town would shut their mouths right up tight on my stockin's. I says to him, I says, 'Mr. Shores, when your wife eloped I was one o' the few — the *very* few — 's blamed *her*, 'n' I beg 'n' pray 't the quality o' your wool won't force me to change my mind. Your clerk 't she eloped with,' I says, 'once give me a nickel three cent piece in place of a dime,' I says, ''n' up to the first washin' o' them stockin's I never so much 's breathed a suspicion of your mebbe dividin' that seven cents with him. But I ain't so sure now,' I says, ''n' I ain't prepared to say what I 'll think from now on,' 'n' then I walked off, leavin' him good 'n' meek, I c'n assure you; 'n' the come-out o' that little game is as my trade, which ranged fr'm ten to fifty cents a week 'n' *always* cash, is lost to him forever hereafter."

Mrs. Lathrop was fairly choking with impatience.

"'N' your cousin —" she interjected quickly, as Susan halted for a slight rest.

"Yes," said that lady, with a certain chilling air of having up to now suffered from inexcusable neglect on the part of her friend, "I was thinkin' 's it was about time 't you begin to show *some* interest in what I come over to tell you — 'n' me here for the best part o' a good half-hour already. Well, 'n' my cousin! She come out o' a letter, Mrs. Lathrop, a old torn letter 's you or any other ordinary person would probably 'a' throwed away without even readin'. But I was never one to do things slipshod, 'n' I read every scrap 's I 've got time to piece together, so it was nothin' but natural 's I sh'd quit work 's soon 's I see Cousin Marion's letter 'n' sit right down to read it. 'N' it 's good as I did too, for 'f I 'd been careless 'n' burned my rubbish unread, Cousin Marion 'd certainly 'a' burnt with the other scraps, 'n' as a consequence I 'd 'a' missed about the happiest minutes 's I 've knowed since father died. You c'n believe me or not, jus' 's you please, Mrs. Lathrop, but I cried over that letter; 'n' if some was the dust in my nose, the rest was real affection, for, Lord knows, when you 're scratchin' out mice 'n' cobwebs you ain't lookin' to find a relation none.

But anyhow, there she was, 'n' if she ain't died in the mean time — f'r the letter was wrote over fifty years ago — I may know suthin' o' family life yet. It was the beautifullest letter 't I ever read. You c'd n't imagine nothin' more beautiful. I 'm afraid 's mebbe mother 'n' me misjudged father, owin' to the everlastin' up 'n' down stairs, 'n' mother used to say right out 't it was a neck to neck tie 's to which he stuck closest to, his bed or his money. But he was n't always like that, 'n' this letter proves it, for Heaven knows what he must 'a' give Cousin Marion to 'a' ever brought her to write him such words 's them. Not to deceive you, Mrs. Lathrop, the letter was that grateful that I was more 'n a little bothered over it. It is n't very likely 's you sh'd be able to understan' my feelin's to their full, 'n' yet you c'n mebbe guess 's it ain't altogether a agreeable thing to suddenly find out 't your own native flesh 'n' blood father 's got distant relations callin' down daily blessin's on him f'r his overwhelmin' generosity. That 's what she said in the letter, 'n' I can't deny 's the words sent a cold chill runnin' down my back-bone 's I read 'em.

"The whole letter was writ in the same style, 'n' it did n't take long f'r me to see right straight through it, 'n' hatch more 'n a suspicion 't the reason 't I never hear o' Cousin Marion afore was 'cause she was head over heels in love with father. It was real touchin' too to think how near her letter came to bein' one o' mother's, 'n' in the end I jus' sneezed till I cried, for, to my shame be it said, Mrs. Lathrop, 't the dust was 's thick in my garret this day 's it is in your parlor the year aroun'."

Susan paused to shake her head and use her pocket-handkerchief over her souvenirs in general. Mrs. Lathrop sat dumb and attentive.

"Marion Prim was her name," the narrator continued presently, "'n' she writ it from Knoxville fifty-one years ago come last October. Did *you* ever hear of her?"

Mrs. Lathrop screwed her face up thoughtfully, but was forced to screw it into a negation after all.

"Seems funny 't father never spoke o' her after mother was so far past bein' jealous 's to be buried. He c'd 'a' said anythin' about anybody them years, 'n' 'f I had time

to listen I 'd 'a' been bound to hear, but to my certain knowledge he never said one word o' family 'xcept to remark over 'n' over 's he thanked the Lord Almighty 's he had n't got none, which words I naturally took 's signifyin' 's he was speakin' the truth. Still a man is a man, 'n' this letter proves 's you can't even be sure o' one 's has been in bed under your own eye f'r twenty years, f'r it not only shows 's he did have a relation, but it shows suthin' else too; it shows me, 's has had four men all tryin' to marry me inside o' the same week, 't suthin' pretty close to love-makin' 'd passed between her 's wrote this letter 'n' him 's kept it carefully hid away till long after he was dead. There 's a shakiness about the writin' 'n' a down-hilledness about the lines 's lets me right into the secret o' their hearts, 'n' I 'm willin' to venture a guess 't Cousin Marion c'd get money out o' father with less pain 'n mother could, under which circumstances I don't blame mother for closin' down on the subjeck.

"The more I consider that letter up 'n' down 'n' hind end to, Mrs. Lathrop, the plainer I see 's Cousin Marion must 'a' been

a sore 'n' abidin' thorn inside o' father 'n' mother. Perhaps it was that as give him the paralysis! The doctor said 's it was suthin' obscure, 'n' 'f suthin' 's ain't found out till years after you 're dead ain't obscure I don't know what is. Anyway I 've took my stand 'n' it was the only sensible one to take. This 's the first chance I 've ever had in all my life to get a nice change without payin' board, 'n' so I jus' sat right down 'n' wrote to Cousin Marion 't 'f it was convenient to her I 'd come to Knoxville 'n' spend next Sunday. She 's bound to be pleased 't bein' remembered after fifty years, 'n' I 've got father's nose, 'n' that 'll help some, o' course. She can't be worse 'n dead, 'n' 'f she 's dead 'n' don't answer I sha'n't never give the subjeck another thought, f'r I naturally ain't got very fond o' her jus' from findin' her musty old letter stuck in behind the flap of a trunk 's I 've been achin' to hack to pieces these last twenty years. I never went up in my garret without I skinned myself somewhere on that trunk, 'n' you know how often I go up garret, Mrs. Lathrop, so it goes without sayin' 's I 've been considerably skinned first 'n' last. But

'f she sh'd be alive 'n' I sh'd get to go there, the Lord knows I certainly shall rejoice to have some o' my own to talk to, f'r blood is thicker 'n water, 'n' although I don't want to hurt your feelin's, Mrs. Lathrop, still you can't in conscience deny 's you ain't no conversationalist. Nobody is that I know hereabouts, neither. The minister talks some, but I 'm always thinkin' how much more I want to tell him things 'n I ever want to hear what he has to say, so I can't in truth feel 's his talkin' gives me much pleasure. Mrs. Macy 's great on gaspin', but she don't as a general thing get very far, 'n' so the long 'n' short o' the whole thing is 't if Cousin Marion ain't a change f'r the better she can't noways be a change f'r the worst, 'n' so I 've made up my mind to sail right in 'n' risk her.

" I 've thought 's it 'll be a nice idea to take her father's cane for a present; it 'll surely come very handy to her, — 'f she 's alive a *tall*, — 'n' since Mr. Kimball over-persuaded me into buyin' one o' them patent carpet-beaters, it ain't no manner o' service to me. Not 's I ain't sure 't I don't really prefer the cane to the

patent, but I 've paid for the new thing 'n' I ain't goin' to go to work to make myself feel 's I 've wasted my money. The carpet-beater ain 't up to Mr. Kimball's talk by long odds, 'n' so far from turnin' into a egg-beater in the wink of your eye like he promised, you 've got to grip it fast between your knees 'n' get your back ag'in a flour-bin to turn it into anythin' a *tall.* 'N' then when it does turn, so far from bein' a joy it lets up so quick 't you find yourself most anywhere. Mrs. Craig was gettin' her brace ag'in the hen-house, 'n' when it let up she sat down so sudden 't she smashed the hen-house 'n' a whole settin' o' duck-eggs not to speak of the hen between. Mrs. Macy says 't seein' 's she has more eggs 'n carpets, she jus' beats her carpets with the egg end 'n' don't fuss to change ever. Mrs. Fisher says what puts her out is 't the ring 's you slide up to close the whisks for killin' flies won't stay up, 'n the flies don't get killed but jus' get hit so they buzz without stoppin' from then on. Mrs. Jilkins says right out 's she considers the whole thing a swindle, 'n' 'f Mr. Kimball was n't rentin' his store o' her brother she sh'd tell him so to his face.

She says the three-inch measure on the handle 's too short to be o' any real service on a farm, 'n' her opinion is 't Mr. Kimball keeps his sample dipped in kerosene or he never could snap it in 'n' out so quick. Anyhow it all comes in the end to the fact 't, havin' bought it, I 'll work it 'f I die f'r it, 'n' so Cousin Marion c'n have the cane, 'n' may she be everlastin'ly happy usin' it. I did n't get my trunk down 'cause I 'll have Friday to pack anyhow, 'n' any one c'n slide a trunk down a ladder any time, but nobody can't never slide nothin' up nowhere. Besides, I sh'd look like a fool puttin' back a trunk 't I 'd hauled out to visit a cousin who like enough died afore I was born, 'n' I ain't no fool, — never was 'n' never will be."

There was a short stop for a fresh supply of breath.

"I wonder 'f — " began Mrs. Lathrop.

"The difficulty o' all things in this world," Miss Clegg went on promptly, "is 't if you have any brains a *tall* you 're bound to have so much work for 'em. Now, this findin' o' Cousin Marion no doubt looks simple enough to you 'n' the world in general, 'n' yet the more I turn her up 'n' down 'n'

inside out the more new lights I get. When you come to consider 't I only found the letter this mornin', 'n' that it ain't supper-time yet, you c'n easy see 's my day 's been more 'n full o' brain-work. Comin' up the street this afternoon, the question o' the possibility o' Cousin Marion's bein' poor come into my mind. I c'n speak out freely to you, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' so I will remark 't I c'n guarantee 's father never give her nothin' o' late years, 'n' 'f she 's poor it don't take no eagle eye to know jus' what 'll happen when she gets my letter. 'F the letter had n't been posted 'n' the sack gone to the train afore I thought o' this view o' the matter, I 'm free to confess 's I never would 'a' posted it a *tall.* For there 's no use denyin', Mrs. Lathrop, 't, 'f my visit to Cousin Marion sh'd lead to her askin' to borrow 's much 's a quarter, I sh'll bitterly regret ever havin' clawed her out from back o' that trunk-flap. There ain't no possible good 's c'n ever come o' lendin' money to them 's ain't able to pay it back, 'n' I learned that lesson to my bitter cost once 'n' for all time when I had that little business with Sam Duruy. That took all the likin' to

lend out o' me, 'n' Heaven help me 'f I ever forget it. I thought I was so safe, Mrs. Lathrop, — I looked in all four o' his hoofs, 'n' swished my handkerchief in each o' his eyes, 'n' he was certainly lively, so I planked down my little five dollars 'n' Sam was to keep on drivin' the horse. Well, you know 's well 's I do what happened, 'n' the skin brought seventy-five cents. Sam sued the railroad, 'n' the railroad asked why he did n't read the 'Look out for the Locomotive.' I told him to go into court 'n' swear 's he could n't read, but he said Judge Fitch used to be his school-teacher 'n' knowed 's he could. 'N' then I offered to go to court myself 'n' swear on the Bible 's the whole town looked on him 's more 'n half a idiot, 'n' Mr. Duruy jus' sat right flat down on the whole thing. So they did n't even pay his lawyer, 'n' it goes without sayin' 't o' course he could n't pay me; 'n' then, do you know, Mrs. Lathrop, 'f he did n't have the impudence this very afternoon to stop me down in the square 'n' ask me 'f I would n't lend him ten cents on a rooster! I was pretty nigh to put out over that, I c'n assure you. I mus' 'a' stared at

him f'r 's much 's ten seconds afore I sensed 't he was really fool enough to think 't mebbe I was fool enough too. 'N' then I let out at him. 'Not while I have the breath o' life in my body,' I says, — 'n' it shook 's I said it, — 'not 'f I know my own mind. What 's to guarantee me,' I says, ''s your rooster won't take it into his head to go a-promenadin' on the railway track?' I says. He begin to tell 's how, even dead, the rooster was worth more 'n ten cents. 'I d'n' know about that,' I says, 'it don't strike me 's noways likely 't when he suddenly observes the engine 'most on top o' him, he 's goin' to take the time 'n' trouble to lay his head square 'n' even across the rail, 'n' you know 's well 's I do 't no rooster killed cornerways ain't never goin' to bring no nickel apiece for his corners. No, Mister Sam Duruy,' I says, 'your lively horse 's taught me a lesson,' I says, ''n' hereafter I don't lend no money on so much 's a egg without I see a good curb-bit bought 'n' put in its mouth first,' I says; 'n' then I walked off, 'n' the end o' it all is 't if Cousin Marion 's poor I certainly ain't very wild to have her find out 's I 'm rich.

"But then, I ain't very anxious to have her rich either, I must say, for it don't take no blind man to figger out 't if she 's rich the money 'd ought to 'a' been mine. 'N' that 's a awful feelin', Mrs. Lathrop, — the feelin' 's other folks 's rich on money 's 'd ought to 'a' been yours. I ain't sure 's I want to know Cousin Marion 'f such 's the facts o' her case, 'n' 's between her bein' poor 'n' wantin' money o' me, 'n' her bein' rich on money right out o' my pocket, I feel like I mebbe clum that ladder this mornin' in a evil hour f'r my future peace o' mind.

"'N' then, too, 'f she 's rich I certainly can't go to see her without I buy me a new bonnet. 'F she 's rich, o' course I want her to see right off 's I 'm rich too, 'n' bein' 's we 're old friends 'n' alone here together, I c'n truthfully state 's she could n't in reason mistrust no such thing from my bonnet. It 's a good bonnet, 'n' it 's been a good bonnet year in 'n' year out 'n' in rain 'n' shine turn an' turn about, but I never was give to deceivin' myself no more nor a outsider, 'n' so I will frankly say 't it 's long past its first shininess. Miss White 's freshened it up two times for me, 'n' I always have new

ribbons to tie it every other Easter, but still, in the box or out o' the box, its day is past for lookin' brand-new, 'n' I don't deny the truth 's a more foolish woman might feel some inclined to do. So, such bein' the case, Cousin Marion 'n' a new bonnet comes to one 'n' the same thing, 'n' I can't say 's bonnet-buyin' 's a way o' spendin' money 's is over-agreeable to me. However, 'f it is to be it is to be, 'n' I sha'n't cry over nothin'. I 'll buy the bonnet, 'n' I guess 'f she talks to me about her money I c'n come out right quick 'n' sharp 'n' talk about mine. 'N' I guess I c'n talk her down — I 'll try good 'n' hard, I know *that*. 'N' 'f she sh'd put me beyond all patience, I 'll jus' make no bones about it, but get right up 'n' smash her flat with her own letter o' fifty years ago. I don't believe nobody c'd put on airs in the face o' their own name signed to bein' saved from want by the kind, graspin' hand o' my dead 'n' gone father."

Susan ceased speaking, and rose suddenly to her feet.

"I must go," she said; "it 's time I was seein' about supper, 'n' it 's been a hard day first 'n' last. It 's been 'xcitin', 'n' I cleaned

the garret too, 'n' then my mind 's all upset 's to travellin', 'n' I 've got to consider a lot afore I c'n decide 's to anythin'. 'N' I only feel plum sure o' one thing, 'n' that is 's I don't want to buy no new bonnet. Bonnets is a awful waste o' money, 'n' I 've got nothin' inside o' me 's cries out to extravagance. But speakin' o' waste reminds me over again 's I don't want to throw no more time away on you, so, 's I 'm always frank 'n' open, I 'll jus' say so 'n' go now."

The letter which Susan Clegg had mailed to her cousin "Marion Prim, Knoxville," did actually reach the hands of the person for whom it was intended, and the evening of the second day after brought an answer which the two friends studied together in a mutual intellectual darkness.

"Says she 's lived for fifty years on the motto, 'S'fficient unto the day 's the evil thereof,' 'n' now my letter 's come," — it was thus that Susan voiced her understanding of the matter, — "says I c'n come 'f I want to, 'n' mebbe it 'll be some consola-

tion! I don't call that by no means cordial, but I 'm bound to consider 't 'f Cousin Marion 's any kin to father she could n't naturally be very open-hearted, 'n' I must overlook her with a good grace 'n' a clear conscience. I 'll go because I 've made up my mind to go, but I won't take no trunk nor yet buy no new bonnet."

Mrs. Lathrop offering no counter advice, Miss Clegg returned to the shelter of her own roof, and to judge by the banging and squeaking that ensued, burglars were barred out from even daring to dream of a possible raid during the absence which was to be upon the following day. About nine o'clock peace fell over all and lasted until the dawn of the eventful Saturday.

When Susan was all ready to start for the station, she called her friend to the fence and shook hands with her so warmly that the tears overflowed the awe in the other's eyes.

"Good-bye, Mrs. Lathrop," she said with a solemnity that had nothing to relieve its sombreness and much to deepen the impressiveness of the moment. "Good-bye! I 'm goin' now, 'n' I sh'll be back this even-

in', 'n' so help me God while I 'm gone, for I have a goose-flesh kind o' a sensation 't I 'm goin' to get a surprise."

Mrs. Lathrop clung to her in a heart-wrung silence. Both the friends were deeply affected, feeling that this journey was a something quite apart from Susan's ordinary every-day little expeditions to the city. Finally Miss Clegg withdrew her hand, straightened out the resultant wrinkles in her mitt, and stalked away. Mrs. Lathrop sighed sadly, returned to her own rocker, and entered upon the course of a long day of patient waiting.

It was about three in the afternoon that, to her great surprise, she saw Miss Clegg returning. There was something altogether new and strange in the gait of the latter while she was at a distance, and as she drew nearer Mrs. Lathrop's eyes and mouth opened together. The nearer that Susan drew the more provocative of astonishment was her general appearance. To sum up the whole state of the case in as few words as possible, I will say that she seemed to have barely survived some hitherto totally unknown species of catastrophe. Mrs. La-

throp, much overcome, ran to the door and cried, —

"Come over! I 've got the kettle — "

"I was comin' anyhow," Susan called feebly back, and wearily dragging herself through the gate, along the walk, and up the steps, sank down finally in one of the kitchen chairs.

Mrs. Lathrop hastened to fortify her with hot tea and gingerbread. She ate and drank in silence for some time, only volunteering, as she took the third cup, —

"I ain't had nothin' since I left home."

"Did n't you find your — " Mrs. Lathrop began eagerly.

"Cousin?" said the traveller, in a tone that suggested revelations as yet unrevealed, — "oh, yes, Mrs. Lathrop, I found my cousin."

Mrs. Lathrop felt herself to be silenced, and spoke no more. Miss Clegg drank all the tea and ate all the gingerbread. Then, when there was nothing else left to do, she declared herself satisfied, and fixing her gaze mercilessly upon the quaking listener, discharged her first shot.

"I wish I 'd never gone!"

This statement was made with a vigor that supported its truth in full. Mrs. Lathrop quivered slightly, and waited breathlessly to hear more.

"I wish I 'd never gone, 'n' for the future, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'll thank you to never so much 's breathe a relation anywhere near me, for I 've had enough family to-day to last me from here to Gabriel 'n' his trumpet, 'n' 'f I ever forget this hour may I die in that one."

Mrs. Lathrop gasped.

Susan coughed and gripped her hands tightly together.

"Mrs. Lathrop, the Bible says 's we may never know what a day 'll bring forth, 'n' 'f I 'd 'a' known that this day was gettin' ready to hatch such a Cousin Marion 's I found, I certainly would 'a' spent it some other way. When I think o' the cheerful lovin' spirit 's I pinned my wave on in, 'n' then reflect on what I pinned it on to, I can't but feel 't if I ain't a fool I 'd ought to be one, 'n' I can't say nothin' stronger for the way I feel. They say 's the Devil 's the father o' lies, but it 's a slander. The Devil is a floatin' angel by the side o' that letter 's I

found. It was a lie, Mrs. Lathrop, a lie from first to last, 'n' it makes my blood run cold to think o' all the years that I lived right underneath it 'n' never 's much 's dreamed o' the iniquity up in that old trunk over my head."

Mrs. Lathrop gasped again.

"Mrs. Lathrop, I never had it in me to conceal nothin' from you. We've been good friends 'n' true through thick 'n' thin, through my father 'n' your son 'n' every other species o' Heaven-sent infliction, f'r years 'n' years 'n' years. 'N' now I ain't goin' to shut you out o' the inside truth o' this awful day. You see me set off this mornin' bright 'n' beamin', 'n' you see me come home this night burnin' 'n' bitter, 'n' it 's nothin' but right 's you sh'd be fully took in to the betwixt 'n' between. It 'll mebbe be a lesson to you some day if anythin' sh'd come up 's led you to look to be extra happy all of a sudden, 'n' you 'll remember this hour 'n' jus' firmly go back into the house 'n' shut the door 'n' say, 'Life 's a delusion 'n' a snare, like Susan Clegg's Cousin Marion.' It 's better for you to learn the lesson 's all is vanity now, than to wait 'n'

have it fall on your head like a unexpected pickle-jar, the way 's this day 's fell on mine."

Mrs. Lathrop's eyes grew big.

" Mrs. Lathrop, in the first place I started out all wrong. Knoxville ain't on this line a *tall.* It 's on the A. 'n' B., 'n' only the junction is on this line. Mrs. Lathrop, don't you never trust yourself to no junction in this world o' sin 'n' sorrow, whatever else you may in your folly see fit to commit. My experience c'n jus' 's well be a warnin' to you too, f'r I was put off three miles from where there ain't no omnibus, 'n' I had to leg it over a road 's is laid out three hills to the mile. I ain't one 's is give to idle words, but I will remark 't by the time I 'd clum the fourth hill I had n't no kind o' family feelin's left alive within me, 'n' when I did finally get to Knoxville I was so nigh to puffed out 't I c'd hardly find breath to ask where Cousin Marion *did* live. It was a boy skippin' rope 's I asked, 'n' he never quit skippin' for one second out o' politeness. Seems he was doin' a thousand steady on a bet, 'n' I 'm free to confess 's I felt pretty foolish askin' questions 'n' his rope

like to catch on my nose every other word. I finally made out, though, 's Cousin Marion lived out the other end o' town, 'n' so I walked on till I come to the road. Mrs. Lathrop, it was another road o' hills, 'n' I must say 's the sight made my blood run cold for the third time in one day. F'r a minute I thought seriously o' jus' takin' a train away ag'in 'n' lettin' Cousin Marion fiddle alone f'r another fifty years, f'r I give you my word o' honor, Mrs. Lathrop, 's I was 'most dead, 'n' Lord only knows what made me keep on, f'r what came after was enough to shake my faith in the Lord forever 'f I really believed 's any one but Cousin Marion had one word to say in the matter. But I was raised to finish up all things 's is begun, 'n' I snapped my teeth tight together 'n' set out over them extra hills with all the resignation 's I c'd scrape up f'r the need o' the moment. I was hot inside 'n' hot outside, but I 'd made up my mind to see the thing through 'n' so I pegged right along.

"Well, Mrs. Lathrop, 'f I was on the witness stand with Bibles above 'n' below, I c'd n't but swear 's it was two miles 'f it was

a cent. 'N' even then they was a long two miles. I was on my very last legs when I got there, 'n' nothin' 't I see revived me none. Mrs. Lathrop, the awfullest old tumble-down house 's ever you see — pigs in the yard, 'n' 'Prim' on the gate-post! 'N' me standin' pantin' for breath, 'n' related to 'em all!"

Mrs. Lathrop's eyes grew bigger and bigger.

"There was a old man a-sittin' on a chair on the porch in one boot 'n' one slipper 'n' a cane. He looked 't me 's if it 'd be nothin' but a joy to him to eat me up alive 'n' jus' relish to gnaw the bones afterwards. You c'n maybe realize, Mrs. Lathrop, 's I was n't no ways happy 's I walked a little piece up towards him 'n' said 's I 'd like to see my cousin, Marion Prim. He give such a nod 's seemed 's if his head 'd fly off, 'n' I took it 's she was somewhere near 'n' a-comin'. So, 's I was all used up, I jus' started to sink right down on the steps to wait for her.

"Oh, my soul 'n' body, that minute! — The awful shock! — Oh, Mrs. Lathrop! you never in all your life dreamed such a

yell 's he give! I like to 'a' went deaf! I jumped worse 'n 'f I 'd been shot stone-dead. Wild whoopin' Indians was sleepin' babes beside him. 'Not on my steps!' he shrieked, poundin' with his cane 'n' shakin' with his fist, — 'not on my steps,' he howled louder 'n all below, — 'not while I 'm alive! — not while I c'n prevent! — not while I c'n help it! — no Clegg sits afore me, not now 'n' not never!' You c'n imagine, Mrs. Lathrop, 's I did n't get very far to sat down under them circumstances. I trembled all over, 'n' I backed off quite a little ways 'n' looked at him. He kept chokin' 'n' gaspin' 'n' purple 'n' swallowin', 'n' after a while I got up courage to ask him where Cousin Marion was. 'N' then — oh, Mrs. Lathrop! — 'n' then — well, honest, I thought 's he was goin' to bust! — 'n' then, 'I 'm Cousin Marion!' he yelled right in my face, — 'I 'm Cousin Marion, Susan Clegg!' 'n' at that, Mrs. Lathrop, I went so faint in my knees 'n' so rumbly in my ears 't you c'd 'a' clubbed me with a straw 'n' gagged me with a wisp o' hay that minute. I jus' stood starin', 'n' you c'n believe me or not just 's you please, but I never was so nigh to fallen over backwards in all

my life before. I c'd feel cold drops like water on a duck's back, 'n' my senses was that mixed 't 'f you 'd told me 's my heels was in my hair I would n't 'a' doubted you. I d'n' know 's I ever was scared in all my life afore, but when he screamed them awful words, my very insides got clammy. I c'd n't say a livin' word, I c'd n't make a livin' move; I c'd only stand 'n' shake 'n' listen, 'n' him keepin' on yellin' 'n' poundin' like mad.

"'Susan Clegg,' he screamed, 'Susan Clegg,' — 'n' he kep' poundin' harder 'n' harder 'n' gettin' redder 'n' redder every minute, — 'Susan Clegg, I 'm glad you 've come; I 've wanted you to come; I 've wanted you to come f'r a long time. I did n't know who it 'd be, but I 've been wantin' somebody to come 'n' been waitin' f'r 'em to come f'r fifty years 'n' more too. I 've been holdin in f'r fifty years! I 've been thinkin' what I wanted to say f'r fifty years! Now I c'n say it! Now I c'n be happy sayin' it! I wish it was your father's ears a-shiverin' there afore me, but yours 'll do.'

"My heavens alive, Mrs. Lathrop, you 'd ought to 'a' seen him! He went from red

to purple 'n' from purple to mos' black, 'n' his eyes stood right out, 'n' he shook his cane right in my face 'n' screamed loud enough to set the dead jumpin'.

"'Susan Clegg, your father was a shark! Susan Clegg, your father was a skinflint! Susan Clegg, your father was a miser! Susan Clegg, your father was a thief!' 'n' all this with me where I c'd n't but hear, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' he must 'a' known it too. 'Susan Clegg, I was a young man in difficulties,' he says, ''n' I wanted a hunderd dollars bad,' he says, ''n' 'f I 'd had it I c'd 'a' bought into a nice business 'n' married a nice girl with a nice property 'n' made this place blossom like a wilderness 'n' seen the fig-trees o' my fig-trees sittin' in my shade. 'N' I went to your father, 'n' I told him all the inmost recesses o' my heart o' hearts,' he says, ''n' 'xplained to him how 'n' why 'n' wherefore the business c'd n't but pay, 'n' then took him to see the girl 'n' p'inted out all her good p'ints, 'n' then asked him to lend me the hunderd dollars, 'n' hired a livery horse 'n' drove him home to think about it. 'N' what followed after, Susan Clegg,' — oh, Mrs. Lathrop, I never see the like o' the

way he suddenly swelled 'n' blued right then! — 'n' what come next? I waited the wait o' the innocent 'n' trustin' for one long 'n' unremittin' week, 'n' then, when I was nigh to mad with sittin' on red-hot needles by day 'n' by night without let or hindrance, what did he answer? — what did he answer to him 's laid in the hollow o' his hand, confidin' fully 'n' freely in his seein' what a good investment it 'd be? What did he answer, Susan Clegg? He answered 's he c'd n't do it, 'n' 's it was n't no possible use whatever to ask him again! Susan Clegg, I smashed a winder,' he says, 'right then 'n' there,' he says, ''n' I writ a letter 'n' it must 'a' been that letter 's you found, f'r I never writ him no other afore or after. 'N' then I went West to make my fortune 'n' I did n't make no fortune, but I got my hands on a hunderd dollars 'n' I come home lickety-split to buy that business 'n' marry that girl. I went first to see about the business 's it was right 'n' natural 't I sh'd, 'n' what did I find, Susan Clegg, what did I find?' Mrs. Lathrop, I never see the like in all my days, born or unborn. I thought he 'd yell my head off. 'I found your father 'd bought

the business, my business, 'n' I was left out in the freezin', icy cold! Susan Clegg, I smashed a table,' he says, ' 'n ' two chairs,' he says, ' 'n' I went to see the girl 'n' ask her to wait a little longer, — 'n', Fire 'n' Brimstone 'n' Saltpetre, 'f your father had n't gone 'n' married the girl, — my girl!

" ' 'N' there was all below to pay,' he says, ' 'n' I vowed bloody murder,' he says, ' 'n' they had me up 'n' bound me over to keep the peace, 'n' then they moved away. 'N' I sat down to wait f'r my vengeance,' he says, ' 'n' I 've waited fifty years,' he says. ' I 've spent fifty years grindin' my teeth 'n' whettin' the edge o' my fury, 'n' now — '

" Mrs. Lathrop, I did n't wait to hear no more. I did n't feel like I had strength to. I run. 'N', heavens, *how* I run! I lit out like I was paid for it, 'n' I bet I clum every last one o' them hills 's fast on the up 's the down. When I got to the station there was a train jus' pullin' out f'r I did n't know where, 'n' I hopped aboard like I was shot. It took me to Meadville, 'n' I had to pay the 'xtra fare 'n' wait two hours to get another back here, 'n' I ain't really half through shakin' yet."

Susan stopped, took out her handkerchief and carefully passed it over her brow as one who strives to brush away tormenting visions.

Mrs. Lathrop sat mute and motionless, completely overwhelmed by the recital of her friend's tragic story.

After a few minutes Miss Clegg put her handkerchief back in her pocket and turned a sad and solemn, yet tender look upon her companion.

"Lord knows I'm done with relations from this day on," she said slowly but with great distinctness. "I feel like hereafter I'll be content with jus' you, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' I can't say nothin' stronger f'r what I've jus' lived through."

Mrs. Lathrop's eyes filled with gratitude at this compliment.

But she said nothing.

V

THE MINISTER'S VACATION

MRS. LATHROP had been unable to attend the usual Friday afternoon Sewing Society on account of her pickling. She had completely forgotten what day of the week it was until she had picked all of a dozen cucumbers and it was then too late to stay the tide of events. The pickling had to go forward, and one of the best listeners in the Sewing Society was forced to remain away in consequence.

"I guess you 'll have to go a—" she called across the open space between their kitchen doors when she saw Susan putting on her black mitts in the window about two o'clock, — the hour at which they usually sallied forth in company.

"Alone," Susan called back — "well, I should say 't I am goin' alone. 'F you c'u'd see yourself this minute, Mrs. La-

throp, you 'd easy understand 't even 'f you wanted to go no one in their senses 'd be able to go with you f'r fear o' bein' took for a lunatic."

Mrs. Lathrop glanced dubiously down over herself.

"I spilt — " she began apologetically.

"I c'n see it from here," said Susan, "'n' 's long 's we 're on the subjeck I want to remark right now 't, with the wind settin' the way it 's blowin' to-day, I don't want you to burn nothin' while I 'm gone. 'F you 'll excuse my bein' so open with you, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'll say 't a woman in your circumstances ought not to waste nothin' by burnin' it anyhow, 'n' 'f she does do anythin' so foolish no woman in my circumstances 'd ought to have her house all smelled up."

"I ain't goin' — " began the neighbor.

"That reminds me 't I am," rejoined she of the black mitts; and so saying, she quitted the window and was presently seen departing down her front walk, — a pleasing object in a bonnet of the jetted era and a shawl of no date whatever.

Mrs. Lathrop divided her afternoon be-

tween active service over the vinegar kettle and long rests of delicious unconsciousness in the kitchen rocker. Her temperament was not one which wore itself out in vain regrets over what might have been, and then too she knew that Susan was at the meeting and from Susan she would learn all that might there transpire. About half-past five she began to glance out of the window which looked furthest down the street, and some ten minutes later her watching was rewarded by the sight of Miss Clegg and another lady approaching slowly. An animated conversation appeared to be in progress between the two, and at the gate of Mrs. Lathrop's dearest friend they made a long halt while the latter appeared to be laying down some form of law with uncommon vigor and pointing its points off with her knitting, which she waved about in a manner unwontedly reckless.

Mrs. Lathrop — having not only spilt more during the afternoon, but also been twice the victim of what is technically known as "boiling over" — felt quite unable to make a third at the gate party, and so was forced to masticate her impatience and hover

in the window until Susan turned at last and came up her walk.

"Can you come —" then called the eager waiter.

"Not till after I get my supper," the other replied.

Mrs. Lathrop sighed, and forced herself to further patience. It was all of seven when Miss Clegg finally came over.

"I 'll sit on the steps," she announced. "Bein' 's we 're such friends, Mrs. Lathrop, I may 's well say right here 'n' now 't I would n't sit down in your kitchen this night for no money. I 'd carry the spots till I died most likely 'n' have no one but myself to blame f'r it. You may not thank me f'r sayin' it to your face, but it is n't in me to deceive so much 's a water-bug, 'n' 'f I live to be a hunderd I c'd never forget seein' you make a chocolate cake once. I c'd make a chocolate cake 'n' a king might eat off o' my cuffs 'n' collar when I was through, but what surprised me about your chocolate cake, Mrs. Lathrop, was 't you did n't get into the oven with it in the end, for I 'll take my Bible oath 's you had 's much on you 's on any pan."

"We c'n sit on the —" said Mrs. Lathrop pleasantly.

"I 'm sittin' there already," said the caller, "'n' whenever you get ready to listen I 'll tell you about this afternoon, for it was the most interestin' meetin' 't we 've had since Mrs. Jewett's leg come off to her chair 'n' she run the crochet-hook so far in — you recollec' ? — 'n' the doctors did n't know which way to pull it out. Young Dr. Brown was for pushin' it on through 'cause the hook would catch 'f he drawed it out on the crochet principle, 'n' old Dr. Carter said it would n't do to put it through 'cause it was a fancy Chinese thing 't old Captain Jewett's father brought from China 'n' there was a man's head on the other end with his mustache makin' two crochet-hooks, one each side."

"What did —" said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Don't you remember? — Mrs. Jewett come to 'n' told 'em 't the middle was for needles 'n' 't all they had to do was to unscrew it 'n' take it out opposite ways, 'n' then she fainted, 'n' then they did, 'n' no one thought of there bein' needles in it, 'n' they fell out 'n' she had shootin' pains from

havin' 'em in her for ever so long. Mrs. Macy was sayin' only the other day 't to her order o' thinkin' Mrs. Jewett died o' the darnin'-needles. She says she was forever grabbin' herself somewhere with a sudden yell, 'n' no matter what the doctors said it was jus' them needles, 'n' no sensible person 's saw her actions could doubt it. Mrs. Macy says it was a awful lesson to her against keepin' loose needles in screw things, —she says 't her son sent her a egg from the World's Fair with every kind of needle in it, but she was n't takin' no chances, 'n' she took them needles right out 'n' put buttons in instead."

"I remember she died," said Mrs. Lathrop thoughtfully, "but I —"

"It don't matter," said Susan. "My, but it 's hot! It 's been awful hot this week, 'n' this afternoon it was all but bilin' down there in that little parlor o' Mrs. Craig's. I was f'r sittin' on the porch, but Gran'ma Mullins rocked off a porch once 'n' she was f'r sittin' where she could n't rock off nothin'. I said she could sit on the grass, but she was fussy about that too — said a poison-spider bit her foot once 'n' she had

it come on reg'lar every year f'r seven years after. I come nigh to feelin' put out, but Mrs. Sperrit spoke up just then 'n' asked 'f we 'd any of us noticed how terrible worn the minister's wife was lookin' 'n' did n't we think 't he 'd ought to have a vacation? It was that 't made the meetin' so interestin', f'r in all the years 't we 've had the minister no one ever thought o' givin' him a vacation afore, 'n' when you think how long we 've had him 'n' how steady we 've gone to church as a consequence, I must say 't I think 't it 's more 'n surprisin' 't we did n't give him a vacation long ago. I must say, though, 't my first idea was 't it was a curious thing to give the minister a vacation so as to rest his wife, although I d'n' know 's we could do anythin' kinder for her 'n to get rid of him f'r a spell. Then too, to my order o' thinkin', our minister ain't really ever in need o' no rest, and 'f he needs a change my say would be 'Set him to work.' I said all that to 'em all down there, 'n' Mrs. Sperrit went on then 'n' said 't her idea was f'r 'em both to go, so 's we could all sort o' take a breathin' space together. I agreed with her about the breathin,' f'r I

don't believe no other minister 'n ours ever had thirteen children born in the same house, 'n' I'm free to remark 't if a new minister did n't always sit so solid for new wall-paper 'n' the cistern cleaned out, I'm pretty sure 't the last half-dozen childern 'n' his second wife would certainly have found themselves bein' born elsewhere. 'N', such bein' the case, I don't blame no man f'r wantin' a little free time, 'n' so I joined in, 'n' Mrs. Allen moved 't we all unbutton our collars 'n' discuss the matter, 'n' Gran'ma Mullins took off her cap 'n' we begun right then 'n' there. Mrs. Brown said 't if they was a-goin' now was a very good time 'cause the baby was a year old, 'n' I said 't I c'd agree with her there 'cause if we waited till next summer the baby might be only a month old or maybe only a week old — f'r I must say 't so far 's my observation 's extended there never is no countin' on how old a minister's baby 's goin' be 't any given time. Gran'ma Mullins interrupted me 'n' said 't if we'd excuse her she'd go below her collar 'n' unbutton her top button 'cause her cousin bought it ready-made 'n' all she could tell the clerk was 't she was seventy-three years

old 'n' so perhaps it was only natural 't it should bind a little in the neck. 'N' so she did, 'n' then she moved her head around till she was sure she was all free 'n' then she said, ''N' now as to them childern?' It was kind of a shock, for no one had thought about the childern 'n' Mrs. Craig said pretty feeble-like 't it would n't be no rest to send the minister's wife off with thirteen childern, 'n' I spoke up pretty sharp 'n' asked what kind of a rest the town 'd get if them thirteen childern was left behind. I c'd see 't I 'd hit the nail on the head *then*, jus' by the way 't they all waited to get a drink afore going any further."

Miss Clegg stopped and drew a deep breath.

Mrs. Lathrop looked anxious, not to say fearful.

" It was Mrs. Sperrit as begun again," the narrator continued presently. " Mrs. Sperrit said why not divide the children up among us all 'n' each take one, 'n' she looked to be talkin' sense till they started dividin', 'n' then it turned out 't naturally every one wanted the big easy ones 'n' no one wanted Augustus. I was dreadful uneasy myself

for fear 't I 'd be 'xpected to take Brunhilde Susan on account o' her hind half bein' named for me, but I did n't have to worry long, for Mrs. Allen said 't she 'd take Brunhilde Susan 'cause Polly 's tended Brunhilde Susan so much 't she knows just what Brunhilde Susan 'll stand 'n' Brunhilde Susan knows just what Polly 'll stand. So Brunhilde Susan was fixed, but every one else was all upset 'n' undecided, 'n' it was plain 't nothin' would n't work, so Mrs. Macy up 'n' proposed 't they put all but the baby in a sugar-bowl 'n' shake 'em up 'n' draw.

" Well, we did, 'n' it was 'xcitin', I c'n tell you, 'n' I wish you 'd been there to see their faces. Mrs. Macy drew first, seein' 't it was her plan, 'n' she was awful put out over gettin' Henry Ward Beecher. Seems she was countin' on using her trundle-bed, 'n' she said right flat out 't she *must* use her trundle-bed, 'n' so she jus' up 'n' put Henry Ward Beecher right straight back in the sugar-bowl. Mrs. Sweet drew next, 'n' 'f *she* did n't get Henry Ward Beecher too, 'n' she was madder yet 'cause she was intendin' to have her child sleep with Emma, 'n' she said 't her child had jus' *got* to sleep

with Emma, so she up 'n' stuffed Henry Ward Beecher back into the sugar-bowl too. Then Mrs. Brown wanted to draw, 'n' so they put on the cover 'n' shook 'em up hard, 'n' I could n't but be a little took with how anxious they was to draw when there was only twelve childern 'n' sixteen women, so 't stood to reason 't there was four as could n't get no child to save their necks. I did n't try to draw none myself — I hauled out a lot of stitches 'n' sat back 'n' said when they was all through I 'd come 'n' draw for you and me too, 'n' then I watched 'em all hurryin' Mrs. Brown, 'n' 'f *she* did n't get Henry Ward Beecher same 's all the rest! But she was perfectly satisfied, — she said 't she was lonesome now young Dr. Brown 's gone 'n' married and 't Henry Ward Beecher c'd have his room. So Henry Ward Beecher was out o' the sugar-bowl at last, 'n' I must say 't it was a great relief to see him settled."

"Who drew — " said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Mrs. Sweet drew next. 'N' she drew Augustus, 'n' when she see 't she 'd got Augustus she did n't mince matters none, — she jus' said she 'd never have no Augustus

in her house, not now 'n' not never, 'n' she put him right back, 'n' some one said 't it was n't fair. But they shook the bowl up good, 'n' Gran'ma Mullins 'd been tryin' so hard to get a chance at it 't they let her come next, 'n' she drew, 'n' — my Lord! — she let off a scream like she 'd draw'd a snake 'n' it seemed 't it was Bobby she 'd got, 'n' she said, fair or not, she could n't abide no small boy since she god-mothered Sam Duruy, 'n' so we must excuse her puttin' Bobby back into the sugar-bowl, and so back into the sugar-bowl Bobby got put. Then every one begin sayin' 't it was n't fair, 'n' Mrs. Sperrit stood up 'n' said she knowed a good way. We 'd put sixteen numbers in the sugar-bowl 'n' all draw numbers 'n' then choose from the childern in accordance with our numbers, No. 1 gettin' first pick 'n' No. 2 second 'n' so on. So we did it, 'n' I drew with a pretty heavy heart, I c'n assure you, Mrs. Lathrop, for Lord knows what I 'd 'a' done if —"

"I c'd 'a' taken —" interposed the friend.

"Yes, 'n' you 'd 'a' had to too," rejoined the other. "I thought o' that as I was feelin' 'round, prayin' Heaven to guide me; 'n' it

did too, for I got 14, 'n' after that the rest o' the meetin' was nothin' but sheer circus for me. That was what you missed, Mrs. Lathrop, f'r I don't believe there ever was or ever will be such a Sewin' Society again. Every one quit sewin' in the first place, 'n' Mrs. Duruy, who 'd got No. 1, reflected some 'n' then said she 'd take Felicia Hemans 'cause Felicia c'd help her with her sewin'. Mrs. Sweet was No. 2, 'n' she took Rachel Rebecca to sleep with Emma. Then come Gran'ma Mullins, 'n' she studied a long while 'n' then at last she decided on little Jane 'cause little Jane sucks her thumb 'n' that 's the sign of a good child. Then Mrs. Sperrit came next, 'n' she said she 'd take Bobby 'cause he could n't do no mischief out on the farm. Gran'ma Mullins shook her head 'n' said them laughs best as laughs last, but Mrs. Sperrit stuck to Bobby 'n' did n't pay no attention to Gran'ma Mullins. Well — then Mrs. Brown took Henry Ward Beecher, 'n' Mrs. Kimball took Billy 'cause he 's in the store anyhow, 'n' Mrs. Maxwell took 'Liza Em'ly to rip, 'n' Mrs. Fisher took John Bunyan for weeds. 'N' then Mrs. Macy just pounced on the last

girl for her trundle-bed, 'n' Mrs. Jilkins was pretty mad at there bein' no more girls after the last one 'n' she give a sort o' flounce 'n' said 'Josephus,' 'n' Miss White give a sort o' groan 'n' said 'Fox' in a voice like death. 'N' *then* come *the* time! — Mrs. Davison was No. 12, 'n' every one knew it, 'n' every one 'd been lookin' at her from time to time 'n' she had n't been lookin' at no one, only jus' at her number, 'n' when the time come f'r her to say who she 'd got (for naturally she did n't have no choice) she did n't say nothin' at all, only just begun to pick up all her work things 'n' stuff 'em in that little black bead bag o' hers, 'n' there was a meanin' way about her stuffin' 't said more 'n was necessary. — But o' course some one had to speak, so Mrs. Sweet begun to smile 'n' say, 'N' Mrs. Davison gets Augustus!' 'n' at that Mrs. Davison come up out o' her chair like it was a live coal, 'n' shook all over 'n' glared right in front of her, 'n' said, 'Ladies, this may appear as a joke to you, but it 's far from seemin' funny to the one as gets Augustus. I decline Augustus right square 'n' sharp 'n' flat 'n' now, 'n' if I ever hear another word on the subjeck I shall

cease to ever again play the organ in church on Sunday!'"

Miss Clegg paused dramatically.

Mrs. Lathrop opened her mouth in awe at the climax.

"Well, you c'd 'a' heard the dust settle for a minute or two! No one could n't think o' nothin' to say, f'r the only thing to say was suthin' 't no one in their senses would think o' sayin', but o' course some one had to say it, 'n' Mrs. Craig got up at last 'n' with the tears standin' in her eyes 'n' a kind o' sad look all around her nice tidy house, she sort o' sighed out, 'We must have the organ Sundays, 'n' I 'll take Augustus.' There was a air o' bein' sorry for her all over, but every one was so glad it was her 'n' not them 't they could n't help bein' more relieved 'n anythin' else, 'n' then we all remembered 't we was hot, 'n' hungry too, so we made short work o' app'intin' Mrs. Allen to go 'n' tell the minister how everythin' was arranged for his vacation, 'n' 't it 'd be a favor to us all if he could get away pretty prompt to-morrow so 's we could be all settled down for Sunday. Mrs. Sperrit says she 'll take the bird right along with

Bobby, 'n' Mrs. Allen says 't if they have Brunhilde Susan they can just as well fuss with the cow too, so 's far as I c'n see there 'll be no church Sunday, 'n' I certainly am grateful, for all the time 't I was in church last Sunday I was wishin' 't I was in the crick instid, 'n' I don't consider such thoughts upliftin'."

Mrs. Lathrop slapped at a mosquito.

"They say it's better to be born lucky 'n rich," said Susan, getting up to go, "'n' what you said jus' now, Mrs. Lathrop, proves 't it's true in your case. For if I *had* been obliged to take Brunhilde Susan or any other of 'em, it 'd surely 'a' been a awful care to you just now, what with your picklin' 'n' your not bein' no great hand at childern anyhow."

Mrs. Lathrop assented with two slow nods.

"Mrs. Brown 'n' me walked home together," said Susan, as she slowly turned her steps in the direction of her own house. "Mrs. Brown thinks she 's got the flower o' the flock in gettin' Henry Ward Beecher. She says he 's so big he 'll be no care a *tall*, except to fill his pitcher once in a while."

"It 's Mrs. Craig as has — " said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Yes, I sh'd say so," assented Susan.

And then they spoke no more.

The minister, on the receipt of his parishioners' ultimatum, tarried not upon the order of his going, but went almost at once. Indeed he and his wife packed with such alacrity that at ten o'clock upon the following day (which was Saturday) they were both gone, and the thirteen children, the bird, and the cow had all been distributed according to the Sewing Society's programme.

The day was intensely hot, and in spite of the deep interest which both felt in the wide-spread situation, neither Susan nor Mrs. Lathrop heard any news from the thirteen seats of war until late in the afternoon. At that hour Mrs. Macy called on Miss Clegg, and after the call the latter walked "as far as the square" with her friend. Mrs. Lathrop saw them go out together from her kitchen window, and when Susan failed to return, she possessed her soul with all the unlimited resignation which was her strong point.

Susan did not return until seven o'clock.

"I ain't comin' over," she called from the back stoop, before Mrs. Lathrop could get to the fence; "there ain't nothin' particular to tell 'n' under them circumstances I ain't one to bother to tell it. Every one 't I see was out runnin' about 'n' recountin' how much better they're doin' than might 'a' been expected. Mrs. Craig 's awful pleased over Augustus, says it was all clean slander the talk about him, for he 's 's good 's gold, jus' lays on his back on the floor 'n' says, 'Wash zhat? Is zhat a fly? Zhi a fly? Zhu a fly?' or 'Wash zhat? Zhat dinner? Zhi dinner? Zhu dinner?' 'n' all you have to say is 'Yes — No — No — No' pretty prompt. She says she don't consider him no care a *tall* 'n' she 's glad to have the chance to say so right out. — Mrs. Fisher was into the store while Mrs. Craig was talkin', 'n' she says she 's 'mused to death over John Bunyan. Seems she was never in favor o' Mr. Fisher's havin' a garden, 'n' now John Bunyan 's gone 'n' pulled up all the beets 'n' five rows of little radishes. She was buyin' him a ball an' laughin' to tears over how mad Mr. Fisher was. She says

he took John Bunyan by the shoulders 'n' shook him hard 'n' asked him 'f he did n't know a radish 'n' a beet when he saw one, 'n' John Bunyan spoke right up 'n' said, 'Course he knowed a radish 'n' a beet when he saw 'em, but how was any one to see a radish or a beet till after he pulled it up first?' Oh my! but Mrs. Fisher says Mr. Fisher was hot about it, 'n' it was all of a half hour afore he got over his mad enough to be ready to teach John Bunyan anythin' else, 'n' then he wanted to show him the first principles of graftin', 'n' so she put a big plate of apples where they was handy for the boy to reach, 'n' come down town herself."

Mrs. Lathrop had approached the fence step by step, and now leaned in a confidence-inspiring attitude against its firm support. The sight seemed to affect Miss Clegg without her being conscious of the fact, and she abandoned her first position on the doorstep and advanced also.

"After all, we might 's well be comfortable while we visit," she commented simply, when they found themselves adjusted as of old, "'n' come to think it over I really did

hear quite a piece o' news in town. Mrs. Duruy says she 's set Felicia Hemans to makin' Sam some shirts 'n' Sam is runnin' the sewin'-machine for 'em. Now o' course 'f it comes to such doin's the first day any one can figger on a week ahead, 'n' I had a good mind to say 's much to Mrs. Duruy, but then I thought if I had it in me to do any warnin' I 'd best warn Felicia, 'n' as far 's my experience goes a woman afore she marries a man always admires him full 's much or maybe even more 'n' his own mother can, so it 's breath wasted to try 'n' tell either of 'em a plain truth about him. Now you know, Mrs. Lathrop, 's I was never one to waste my breath, so when Mrs. Duruy said 's she was thinkin' o' goin' over to Meadville to visit her cousin, now 's she had somebody to keep her house for her, I jus' remarked as I hoped she 'd get her house back when she come back 'n' let it go at that. Mrs. Allen was in after mail, 'n' she said Brunhilde Susan was in bed, 'n' the cow was all milked for the night, 'n' her mind was easy over 'em both; 'n' Gran'ma Mullins was to the drug-store after some quinine to put on little Jane's thumb. She says this

week as she has little Jane she 'll jus' cure her o' thumb-suckin' once an' f'r all time by keepin' it dipped in quinine.

"I did n't see none o' the others, but I did n't hear o' their bein' in difficulties, so I come home. Mrs. Macy says Roxana sits 'n' weeps straight along, but she says she did n't have no choice as to her drawin', for between her bein' No. 9 'n' only havin' a trundle-bed Roxana was just forced right down her throat, so she ain't botherin' over her a *tall*. She come out to make calls this afternoon, 'n' she says she sh'll see to her own marketin' same 's ever, 'n' Roxana c'n weep or not weep to suit herself."

"I 'm glad you — " said Mrs. Lathrop thoughtfully.

"I am too," said Susan quickly, "I 'm glad 'n' I sh'll always stay glad. I just had that one time o' carin' for children, 'n' the Lord dealt me a lion instid of a baby, 'n' I 'm free to confess 't I 've never seen no occasion to say other than Thy Will be Done. The sparrows do build awful in the notches of that lion, 'n' the nest in his mouth aggravates me so I d'n' know what to do some days, but still when all 's said 'n'

done a sparrow's nest in the mouth of your father's tombstone ain't any such trial as gettin' a child to bed nights 'n' keepin' its hands clean would be. 'N' if I had adopted a child, Mrs. Lathrop, I sh'd cert'nly 'a' kept it clean, f'r, if you 'll excuse me remarkin' it right in your face, I was raised to wash 'n' dust 'n' be neat. That 's why that nest in my lion's mouth with the straws stickin' every way do try me so. Mr. Kimball 's forever askin' me if the lion 's raisin' a beard against the winter, 'n' the other day he said he was give to understand 't it was tippin' a little, 'n' I was recommended to brace him up by givin' him raw eggs for his breakfast. Well, maybe all Mr. Kimball says is very witty, but it 's a poor kind o' wit, I think. He makes good enough jokes about the rest of the c'mmunity, but I may tell you in confidence, Mrs. Lathrop, 't I ain't never heard one joke 't he 's told on me 't I considered even half-way amusin'."

Mrs. Lathrop shook her head sadly.

Then they went in.

The Sunday which followed this particular Saturday was of a heat truly tropical. All the blinds of the Clegg and Lathrop

houses stayed tightly closed all day, and it is only fair to surmise that those who remained behind them were not sorry that the minister's absence allowed them to do so with a clear conscience.

But about half-past seven in the evening Susan's shutters began to bang open with a succession of blast-like reports, and shortly after she emerged from her kitchen door and started down town. Mrs. Lathrop, who was of course cognizant of every movement on her neighbor's part, saw her go and made haste to be ready against her home-coming. To that end she set her front door hospitably open, drew two rockers out upon the porch, laid a palm-leaf fan in one, and deposited herself in the other.

It was nearly an hour before Miss Clegg returned from town. She appeared very warm, but pleased with herself for having gone. As she sank down in the chair and began to agitate the fan, Mrs. Lathrop's eyes fairly gleamed with anticipation.

"I s'pose — " she began.

"Well, no," said Susan, "seems they ain't, after all. The air down town is more like a revival than anythin' else, everybody

's up tellin' their experience an' callin' out on Heaven to save 'em. 'N' the worst of all is Mrs. Brown! — she *never* knew 't Henry Ward Beecher walks in his sleep! No more did I nor nobody else, 'n' I must say 't I do think 't the minister 'd ought to 'a' told some of us so 's we could 'a' been a little prepared, for there 's many a night 's I 've left clothes out on the line 's I 'd never risked 'f I 'd been aware o' the possibility o' Henry Ward Beecher bein' broad-cast. Mrs. Brown says, though, 's it ain't his walkin' in his sleep as is troublin' her, it 's his eatin' in his walkin'. Mrs. Lathrop, you never hear the like o' what she told me! It 's beyond all belief! He eat the Sunday layer-cake 'n' the Sunday-dinner pie 'n' the whole week's tin o' doughnuts, 'n' then went back to bed 'n' never turned a hair. Why, she says she never *did* — in all her life. She says when she see the jelly streaks on the bed an' felt his sticky door-knob, she was all used up, for Babes in the Woods was criminal beside the way he looked to be sleepin'. 'N' he don't remember nothin' a *tall* to-day, not one livin' doughnut does that boy recolleck, 'n' she says 'f she did n't know it to be so on

a'count o' the empty tin she'd doubt herself an' believe him by choice, he looks so truthful. But empty tins is empty tins, 'n' no one can deny that fact.

"I see Mrs. Craig too. Mrs. Craig 's some altered as to her yesterday's view in regard to Augustus. That cat 't she makes so much over 's gone, 'n' she 's most crazy as a consequence. It 's him as she warms her feet on winters, 'n' when I asked her how under the sun she come to feel the need o' it to-day she did n't even smile. She says she asked Augustus right off 's quick 's she missed it, 'n' all he said was, 'Wash zhat? Zhat a cat? Zhi a cat? Zhu a cat?' 'n' she see 't there was n't no information to be got out o' him. She says, though, that if you bar the cat he 's pretty good, only he 's so tiresome. He follows her all over, sayin', 'Wash zhat? Zhat a hair-pin? Zhi a hair-pin? Zhu a hair-pin?' She says it ain't nothin' to really complain of, but it 's gettin' a little wearin', 'n' she was lookin' more worried 'n her talk bore out, but Miss White come up 'n' begun about Fox, 'n' that kind o' ended Augustus. Miss White says 'f the minister wanted to name a child

after Fox's Martyrs he was welcome, but she 'n' her family never bargained on bein' the martyrs. She says 't Fox takes fits o' yellin' 'n' when he begins he don't never stop. Her mother 's deaf, 'n' said to let the child yell it out 'n' teach him a lesson, but Deacon White has got his ears same as ever, 'n' he could n't stand the noise, 'n' so he hired Fox to stop by promisin' him a trumpet 's soon as the store is open to-morrow mornin'. Miss White says her mother said buyin' trumpets was a poor kind o' discipline, 'n' Mrs. Fisher come along just then 'n' said her notion o' discipline was rewardin' the good instead o' the bad, 'n' 't she was goin' to give John Bunyan a dish o' cookies to keep in his washstand drawer, 'cause he went out in the garden this mornin' while Mr. Fisher was down for the mail, 'n' he tried his last night's lesson in graftin' on things in general there, 'n' he grafted corn 'n' potatoes 'n' asparagus all back 'n' forth 'n' killed 'em all. She says Mr. Fisher was awful mad 'n' wanted to shake John Bunyan, but she jus' up 'n' told Mr. Fisher 't she 'd been tellin' him 't there was a mighty big difference between theory 'n' practice f'r

these many years, 'n' 't now John Bunyan was sent by the hand o' Providence to show him jus' what she meant.

"I see Mrs. Macy too, 'n' she's happy for the whole town. Seems Roxana was so lonesome for the other dozen 't she jus' sat 'n' rolled down tears steady, 'n' this afternoon when Mrs. Sperrit drove in to see her sister she jus' took Roxana home with her. She says Roxana 'll be happy with Bobby on the farm, 'n' it's easy to be seen as Mrs. Maxwell is envyin' Mrs. Macy, for she says 't it's as plain 's the nose on the outside o' your face 't 'Liza Em'ly 's nothin' to rip."

Miss Clegg ceased speech to rock and fan for a minute or two.

"Did you see —" asked Mrs. Lathrop.

"I see every one almost," replied the other. "I see Polly Allen wheelin' Brunhilde Susan around the square. Polly said 't the heat was hard on the cow 'n' hard on Brunhilde Susan. She says the cow 's got to have suthin' on 'n' Brunhilde Susan 's got to have everythin' off or they ain't neither of them peaceable to live with long. I ain't so happy over Brunhilde Susan 's I would be if she had more sense. She was cryin'

'Moo — moo' at every dog she see, 'n' I give her a nickel to keep her quiet, 'n' then she up 'n' lost it. We hunted an' hunted 'n' did everythin' in kingdom come to find it — for I naturally did n't feel to come away without it — 'n' finally Polly said 's she must 'a' swallowed it, 'n' she asked her, 'n' she said 'Yes,' 'n' I was more 'n disgusted. It was a full minute before I could remember to thank my stars as it was n't a half-dollar — 's it might easy 'a' been, for bein' the namesake of a child kind o' obliges you to be nice to 'em. Brunhilde Susan can't never expect to get nothin' out o' her front half, for I was give to understand 't the Brunhilde 's Felicia Hemans was so book-took with is long dead, 'Dragged at horses' tails,' she had the face to tell me — the joint godmother! — ''N' who by?' I could n't in decency but ask. — 'By the horses,' says Felicia Hemans, a-gigglin' fit to beat the band. Well, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'm pretty patient with the young in general, but I must say 's I can't but feel 't when them shirts o' Sam Duruy's is done 'n' their consequences is added up, it 's a even thing which draws the least, — him or Felicia. Mrs. Macy told

me 't Mrs. Duruy has her things all washed 'n' ironed to go to Meadville to-morrow, 'n' I reckon 't a woman 's is as blind 's that 'll be jus' 's happy in Meadville as anywhere else."

Susan paused and rose from her seat.

"Are you a —" said Mrs. Lathrop.

"Looks like it, don't it?" replied Miss Clegg. "'S a matter o' fact, Mrs. Lathrop, I 'm that hot 'n' tired 'd it 'd take a long sight more 'n you to keep me any longer, so I 'll say good-bye 'n' go."

On Monday the thermometer bounded higher than ever. It was wash-day too, which rendered one half of the community infinitely hotter yet. As the burden of the minister's vacation fell upon the same half that the washing did, one might have looked for very little friendly exchanging of personal trials on the evening that followed such a trying day. Susan felt such to be the case and concluded not to try and go down town. Mrs. Lathrop took two or three wilted clovers, and sat on her steps and chewed submissively after tea, — too much overcome

even to waft a questioning glance across the interim of parched grass which stretched between her kitchen stoop and that of her friend; but the latter saw her sitting there and felt a keen, remorseful stab.

"I guess I'll go down in the square f'r jus' five minutes," she called to the dejected figure, and forthwith sallied out to the conflict.

The five minutes stretched to an hour, and Mrs. Lathrop was frankly asleep when her vigil was terminated by her neighbor's return. The latter came up and sat down on the steps, heaving a mighty sigh as she did so.

"Well, I see Mrs. Brown," she began in a tone of reminiscent sympathy, "'n' I can tell you 't Mrs. Brown is in a situation not to be lightly sneezed over."

"What did —" remarked Mrs. Lathrop, rubbing her eyes.

"What did Henry Ward Beecher do? Well, he jus' up 'n' did the same 's the night afore. Ate the Sons o' Veterans' pudding 's Mrs. Brown had all ready for the Lodge meetin', 'n' all the baked beans 's was for to-day's luncheon too. She says she never dreamed as no human bein' could hold

what that boy can. She says young Dr. Brown says 't he wants to come 'n' observe him to-night 'f he don't have to go over to Meadville to get two of his saws sharpened. Mrs. Brown says he says he 's goin' to write a paper for the Investigatin' Society, but I don't see how that 's goin' to help the Sons o' Veterans none. Doctors' observations 'n' investigations 's all right 's far 's they go, but I don' fancy as they can be made to take the place o' no eat up puddin' inside o' no son of a veteran. 'N' anyhow, Henry Ward Beecher or no Henry Ward Beecher, Mrs. Craig 's jus' about frantic over her cat. She says there 's cat's hair everywhere 'n' the cat ain't nowhere. She was doin' out her churnin' 'n' she found some hairs in the butter. I asked her 'f maybe Augustus had n't fed the cat to the cow, 'n' she says they thought o' that, but her husband says 't ain't possible, for there ain't room for a cat to turn over in the place where a cow turns everything over afore she swallows it. Mrs. Craig says, besides, 't she asked Augustus, but he jus' said, ' Wash zhat? — Zhat a cow? — Zhi a cow? — Zhu a cow? ' 'n' she see plain 'n' forever where he got the name o' bein' so bad,

for she was dyin' to switch him 'n' could n't in honor say as she had any real reason to. But all the same she says she 's as sure as Fate 't him 'n' no one else 's at the bottom o' her cat — only how in all creation are you to get it out o' him? She says there was hairs in the washtub 'n' hairs in the bluein', 'n' when she gathered the sweet peas afore supper she see a hair on a sweet-pea pod. While we was talkin' suthin' tickled her 'n' she found a hair in her collar.

"Gran'ma Mullins came along up from the crick while we was talkin', 'n' she had her tale o' woe same 's the rest. Seems little Jane 's quit her thumb, owin' to the quinine, 'n' took to bitin' holes 'n' chewin' 'n' suckin' everythin' that she can lay hands on. She 's chewed her pillow-slip 'n' bit her sheet 'n' sucked right down to the brass on a number o' Gran'ma Mullins' solid silver things. They 've tried scoldin' 'n' slappin', but she jus' keeps her mouth on the rampage, 'n' they can't get her to go back to her thumb f'r love nor money. Mrs. Brown said she 'd be glad to trade Henry Ward Beecher for little Jane, 'n' I strongly advised her to do it, f'r to my mind a chewin' child 's more to

be counted on than a eatin' sleep-walker, but we was evidently all o' the same way o' thinkin, f'r Gran'ma Mullins shook her head 'n' would n't change.

"I see Felicia Hemans down buyin' suthin' with Sam along with a basket to carry it home in. I asked 'f Mrs. Duruy was gone, 'n' they said yes, 'n' Sam grinned 'n' Felicia giggled, same 's usual. I c'n see 't the Allens is all put out 't Sam's bein' around with any one but Polly, 'n' Mrs. Allen asked me 'f I really thought Mrs. Duruy 'd ought to 'a' gone off like that. I said I thought it was a awful risk for Felicia Hemans 'cause o' course she *might* marry Sam in consequence. Mrs. Allen did n't like it, 'n' she bounced Brunhilde Susan's carriage-springs so hard 't she made Brunhilde Susan wake up. Mr. Kimball was out in front o' his store, 'n' he hollered across to me 't he was giv' to understand as Brunhilde Susan was learnin' to hang onto money already. Every one laughed, 'n' I declare 't for the life o' me I don't see how no one c'n make a joke over a baby's swallowin' a lent nickel."

"Who —" queried Mrs. Lathrop.

"Well, Mrs. Fisher was one of 'em. She did sort of explain it away afterwards, though. She said she was so happy she laughed at any nothin' at all. Seems Mr. Fisher set John Bunyan to cuttin' the grass, 'n' the boy went 'n' sheared right over the bed o' petunias. Seems them petunias was the apple o' Mr. Fisher's eye 'n' he wanted a dish of 'em with every meal. Mrs. Fisher says 't to her mind a woman has work enough gettin' the meals without havin' to get petunias too, 'n' she was nothin' but glad to see what a clean shave John Bunyan made o' the whole thing. She was down town buyin' him some marbles. She went into Shores after 'em, an' she 'n' Miss White come out together. I know suthin' had happened the minute I see Miss White's face, f'r angels chantin' glory was nothin' to it. Do you know, Mrs. Lathrop, that Fox never lived up to the trumpet bargain one hour, but jus' yelled 'n' blew alternate, till the Deacon was nigh to deaf 'n' old Mrs. White begun to hear, 'n' they was all 'most fit for the Insane Asylum when Mrs. Sperrit come in to leave a skirt for new braid, 'n' she jus' up 'n' took Fox

home with her. She says 't he can make all the noise he wants to out on the farm, 'n' the Whites is all but in Paradise as a result."

"I sh'd think —" suggested Mrs. Lathrop.

"Well, I d'n' know," said Susan; "you may think so, but you did n't look like it when I come. You looked to be asleep, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' bein' 's to-day 's been a hot Monday 'n' to-morrow 'll likely be a hot Tuesday, I feel some inclined that way myself. So good-night."

Susan's prophecy as to what the next day would be came true. It was a scorching Tuesday, and nothing but the feast of gossip which "the square" held upon this particular week could ever have drawn a crowd there on so sultry a night.

"But every one was out," she told Mrs. Lathrop, as they met by the fence along towards nine o'clock, "'n' oh my! you 'd ought to 'a' been there. Mrs. Craig 's found her cat, 'n' that takes the lead, for she come back of her own accord from a

place where no one 'd ever 'a' expected her to come back from."

"Where did—" asked Mrs. Lathrop eagerly.

"Come up in the well-bucket," replied Miss Clegg promptly,—"she come up in the well-bucket this afternoon all but her tail, 'n' they think Augustus must 'a' strained that throwin' her in by it 'n' so it soaked off extra easy. Mrs. Craig went for him the minute she see the cat, but, lor', you can't get nothin' out o' Augustus; he jus' said, 'Wash zhat?—Zhat a cat?—Zhi a cat?—Zhu a cat?' 'n' Mrs. Craig was too mad f'r words. She says 't they've been noticin' a curious taste in the water, but not bein' in the habit o' drinkin' the house cat, they never thought of its bein' him. She's troubled over findin' the cat 'n' troubled some more over not findin' the tail. She says Mr. Craig says 't he would n't consider for one second cleanin' out a well for a trifle like a cat's tail, 'n' yet, for her part, she ain't noways inclined to keep on livin' on cat's hairs indefinitely. She says 't Mr. Craig says 't she can easy fish the tail up with the well-bucket, but fishin' for suthin' 's you

can't see ain't so funny as a woman's husband 's apt to make out. 'S far 's my observation 's 'xtended, a man always gives his wife to understand that what 'd be a bother or mebbe impossible for him to do 'll be jus' a pleasant afternoon for her. I took it on myself to tell her that very same thing. 'Let him fish that tail himself for a day or two,' I says; 'about the six hundred an' fortieth time 't he winds up that bucket 'n' finds himself still short o' that tail I 'll venture my guess 't he won't find the joke 's fine 's he did at first.' But she was too used up to know when she was havin' good common-sense talked to her; she jus' kep' wipin' her eyes, 'n' then Mrs. Sperrit drove up 'n' the whole rigmarole had to be gone over again for her. I mus' say that she behaved kind of un-neighborly, f'r she laughed fit to kill herself, 'n' Mrs. Craig was nigh to put out over such doin's, — 'n' the cat not dead a week yet; but when Mrs. Sperrit got through laughin' she made up f'r it all, for she said if Mrs. Craig was willin' she 'd take Augustus home with her. Mrs. Craig could n't believe she was in earnest at first, 'n' then she wept again

with sheer joy. 'N' what *do* you think 't Mrs. Sperrit did? — Took Augustus straight across to Mr. Shores 'n' bought a dog-collar 'n' a chain for him 'n' buckled it on right then and there. 'I 'll engage he don't throw no cats down no wells out on the farm,' she says, 'n' then off she drove with the youngster sittin' up beside her prim 's a poodle."

"Did you hear —" asked Mrs. Lathrop, chewing pleasantly.

"I see Mrs. Brown," Susan continued calmly, — "she was down in the square. Seems 't young Dr. Brown did n't get to observe Henry Ward Beecher like he expected. He 'n' Amelia went over to Meadville, 'n' mebbe they 'll go on to the city from there, f'r his practice is spreadin' so 't he 's got to buy a bigger borin'-machine, 'n' he wants a lot more bastin' thread an' needles. But Henry Ward Beecher was up 'n' doin' as usual last night. He skum two pans o' milk 'n' did n't put the covers back, so a June bug got in. Mrs. Brown says Mrs. Craig 's welcome to drink her cat if she favors the idea, but she ain't drinkin' no June bugs herself, so she

had to give the complete pan to the pigs. 'N' he eat more too!—he eat a jar o' watermelon pickles 'n' all the calves-foot jelly 't was all ready f'r old Mrs. Grace. It's a serious matter about the jelly, for Mrs. Grace 's most dead 'n' all the calves in town is alive, 'n' so where any more jelly 's to be got in time the Lord only knows. Mrs. Brown thinks some one 'd ought to write to the minister; she says it ain't possible 's he 's always eat like this nights 'n' she wants to know how to put a stop to it. Mrs. Allen thinks 't some one 'd ought to write to the minister too. She says 't Sam 'n' Felicia was down on the bridge last night a-holdin' hands. She says Polly saw 'em.

"'N' Gran'ma Mullins is another as thinks 't some one 'd ought to write to the minister. She was down town a-buyin' some honey to put on little Jane's thumb. She 's all but stark mad. She says mice 'n' moths is goin' to be mere jokes to her hereafter. She says 'f the minister don't come back soon little Jane 'll have her sucked out o' bed 'n' board. She says little Jane 's like him in the history 't where he chewed the grass never grew again. There seems to be

considerable anxiety 's to when the minister 'll get back. Nobody thought to ask him where he was goin', 'n' as a consequence nobody knows where he 's gone. Nobody thought to ask him when he was comin' back, 'n' 's a consequence no one knows when he 's thinkin' o' comin' back. Mr. Kimball says 't his view o' the matter is as the minister was tired o' havin' thirteen children 'n' is gone off somewhere else to begin all over. Fun or not, the idea 's sort of upset every one. They went down to see where he bought his ticket for, but Johnny says he only took it to the junction, 'n' my own experience is 't a junction may lead to 'most anythin'. Mrs. Macy says 's there 's only one way to be sure whether he 's gone for good or not, 'n' that is to go up to the house 'n' see whether he took his ear-muffs along, for it stands to reason 't any man who 'd pack his ear-muffs a week like this ain't intendin' to ever return. Every one see the sense o' that, 'n' so Mrs. Macy 's ap-p'inted herself to go 'n' look the house over to-morrow mornin'. I must say 't 'f she don't find them ear-muffs the c'mmunity 'll be pretty blue to-morrow night. No one

knew how fond they was of the minister until they begin to find out what them thirteen childern come to when you add 'em all up separately. I d'n' know 's I ever was so glad of anythin' in my life 's I am that I drew No. 14 out o' Mrs. Craig's sugar-bowl. Fate 's a strange thing when you look it under 'n' over 'n' hind end to, Mrs. Lathrop, — there was me drawin' No. 14 'n' Mrs. Craig herself gettin' Augustus, 'n' all on account of a sugar-bowl, 'n' that sugar-bowl hers 'n' not mine."

Mrs. Lathrop applied her clover, but said nothing.

"Well, I d'n' know as there's any good to be gained out o' our standin' here chattin' any longer. We 'd better be gettin' to bed 'n' thankin' our merciful Father 't we hav'n't got none o' the minister's children, 'n' that 's a prayer 's not many c'n put up this night."

Mrs. Lathrop threw her clover away and returned to her own domicile.

On Wednesday, between the intense heat and the equally intense excitement engen-

dered by Mr. Kimball's suggestion, the town was rife with a hive-like tumult. Miss Clegg went down to return Mrs. Macy's call soon after dinner, and when she got back it was all of six. Mrs. Lathrop was so anxious to hear the latest news from the seat of war that she had prepared a company tea by the dining-room window and hailed Susan directly she was near enough to hail.

"I want you to come to —" she cried.

"Well, I believe I will," her friend answered cordially. "I believe I 'd really enjoy to pervided you ain't got nothin' with dried currants in it. They say the heathen Chinese eat flies for currants, but I never was no heathen Chinese."

"I ain't got —" Mrs. Lathrop assured her.

"Then I 'll come 's soon 's I c'n get my bonnet off," Susan answered, and proceeded to unlock her own domain and enter into the sacred precincts thereof.

Ten minutes later the friends sat on opposite sides of Mrs. Lathrop's hospitality.

"I s'pose 't a good deal —" began the older woman, as she poured out the tea.

"More 'n any other day," said the younger;

"it almost seems 's 'f more 's happened than I c'n remember to tell over again. I see Mrs. Macy, 'n' it was lucky 't I went to see her, f'r she was *the* one 's knowed everythin' *this* day, f'r sure. The first thing she told me was 't the minister 's got his ear-muffs right along with him. She says the ear-muffs is the only thing 't she did n't find, f'r she 's willin' to swear 's she opened more 'n a hunderd bundles. She said she was clean wore out towards the last, 'n' discouraged too, 'n' she thought she 'd go over to Mrs. Duruy's 'n' ask Felicia Hemans if she know'd anythin'; so she did, 'n' when she got there the house was all shut up, 'n' a piece o' paper stuck in the front door between the knob 'n' the wall, simply statin' 't Felicia Hemans 'n' Sam was gone to Meadville to get married. All it said was 'Me 'n' Sam were married in Meadville afore you can get this. Your everlasting daughter.' She see 't it was meant for a little surprise for Mr. Duruy when he come home 'xpectin' to get his dinner, 'n' she thought she 'd ought to give it to him right off; so she went back 'n' got her stick 'n' jus' went to town 's quick 's ever she could 'n' walked

straight in on him with it. He took on awful 'n' stamped around an' shook his fist right in her face, an' swore at her till she was frightened 'most to death, 'n' then it turned out 't he'd thought as it was her 's had married Sam on a'count o' there bein' no 'Felicia' signed to the letter. The other shock when he come to understand brought on a appleplecktic fit, 'n', seein''s young Dr. Brown 's away, they had to send 'way to Meadville f'r old Dr. Carter, 'n' Mrs. Macy had to stay 'n' take care of him, with him light-headed half the time 'n' the other half all out o' his mind 'n' sure she was married to Sam. She said 't it didn't take much o' such doin's to get her so aggravated 't she jus' told him flat 'n' plain 's she was sixty-seven years old and that meant 's she knowed sixty-seven years too much to marry his son. She said he begin to rave 'n' choke all fresh 't that, 'n' her patience come clean to a end right then 'n' there, 'n' she picked up the water-pitcher 'n' told him 'f he dared to have another fit she 'd half drown him. She said he got reasonable pretty quick when he see she was in earnest, 'n' she had him sittin' up by the window afore Dr. Carter

got there. Mrs. Duruy 'n' Sam 'n' Felicia Hemans all drove over with the doctor, 'n' Dr. Carter had telegraphed young Dr. Brown to come 'n' observe Mr. Duruy's fit with him, so Dr. Brown 'n' Amelia 's home too, 'n' all down around the crick is real gay. O' course Mrs. Macy 'd done with the fit afore they got there, but young Dr. Brown wants Dr. Carter to stay over night 'n' observe Henry Ward Beecher, 'n' Dr. Carter says 't he thinks he will. He says he ain't got no real important case on hand jus' now, only he says it 's a ill wind 's blows no man good 'n' he's lookin' for this heat to lay some one out afore long.

"Gran'ma Mullins come up to Mrs. Macy's while I was there, 'n' she 's pretty mad. Seems she hurried to Mr. Duruy's jus' 's soon 's she heard of the doctors there, 'n' wanted 'em to come over to her house 'n' observe little Jane's thumb, 'n' Dr. Carter jus' flatly up and said little Jane's thumb was beneath the kingdom o' medicine. She was awful put out about it, 'n' she vows 'n' declares 's she 'll die afore she ever asks another doctor to do anythin' f'r her. I guess that 's true enough too, f'r 'f the

minister really is gone nothin' ain't never goin' to cure her o' little Jane. Mrs. Macy give her some tea, but she was too used up to drink it. She says little Jane 's gettin' worse 'n' worse. She bit a piece out of a gold-band cup last night, 'n' she gnawed all the jet cherries off o' Gran'ma Mullins' best bonnet while Gran'ma Mullins was to Mrs. Duruy's."

Miss Clegg paused to eat and drink somewhat. Mrs. Lathrop, who had finished her own eating and drinking, sat breathless.

"I see Mrs. Fisher on my way home. She 's happy as ever. She says nothin' must do last night but Mr. Fisher must build a flyin'-machine with John Bunyan to hold the nails when he hammered. Mrs. Fisher says she quit holdin' nails afore she 'd been married a year 'n' Mr. Fisher 's jus' wild now 't he 's got a new hand to hold his nails f'r him. She says they were tinkerin' on the thing all last evenin' 'n' a good part o' this mornin' 'n' two mattresses to beat 'n' a chair to mend 's never counted for anythin'. Well — seems 't towards noon Mr. Fisher got to where he could go down town to get the top part pumped up, 'n'

while he was down town what did John Bunyan do but up 'n' put wheels on the bottom part? My! but Mrs. Fisher says 't Mr. Fisher was mad when he got back 'n' see them wheels. He tied the pumped up part to the hammer 't was layin' on the garden bench, 'n' then he shook John Bunyan hard 'n' asked him what in thunder he meant by puttin' wheels on a flyin'-machine, 'n' John Bunyan jus' up 'n' asked him to his face how under the sun he was 'xpectin' to make the thing go 'f it did n't have no wheels on it. Mrs. Fisher says she was in behind the kitchen blinds 'n' she was fit to kill herself laughin' to see how mad Mr. Fisher got, — he got so mad 't he backed up 'n' fell over the garden bench 'n' busted the pumped up part o' the flyin'-machine all hollow. Mrs. Fisher says it finished her to see a flyin'-machine with the top part all holes 'n' the bottom part all wheels. She says she 's give John Bunyan her father's cuff-button 'n' told him 'f he keeps on 's well 's he 's begun 't she 'll give him a button f'r the other cuff the day he 's twenty-one.

" Mrs. Brown was down town buyin' eggs. She says them Leghorns o' hers can't

begin to keep up with Henry Ward Beecher. She says, besides, 't she has n't no scraps to feed 'em since he 's come, 'n' so the knife cuts two ways. She 's mighty glad that the observin' 's goin' to begin to-night, f'r she says she 's prayin' Heaven for relief but she ain't got much faith left. Mr. Kimball was feelin' mighty funny, 'n' he hollered to her 't she wa'n't the first to have her faith shook by Henry Ward Beecher, but we was all too considerate for her feelin's to laugh. I would n't laugh at a joke o' Mr. Kimball's anyhow."

"I wish —" said Mrs. Lathrop mildly.

"It 's a curious thing," continued Susan, —"it 's a mighty curious thing how many folks is give to likin' to hear themselves talk. Mr. Kimball 's a sad example o' that kind o' man. I 'd sometimes enjoy to stop 'n' exchange a few friendly words with him, but, lor' ! I 'd never get a chance. The minister is about all I c'n stand in the talkin' line — 'n' you, o' course, Mrs. Lathrop."

The evening after, as Susan was snapping out her dish-towels, she spied her

neighbor meandering back and forth among the clover blossoms. Later she observed her standing — ruminative and ruminating, so to speak — at the fence. There was always a potent suggestion in Mrs. Lathrop's pose, as she leaned and waited, which vastly accelerated Miss Clegg's after-dinner movements. In this case less than two minutes intervened between the waiting of Mrs. Lathrop and the answering of her younger friend.

"Was you to — " the older woman asked, as her eyes were brightened by the approach of her medium of communication with the world at large.

"Oh, yes," replied that lady, "I was to town, 'n' the whole town 's light-headed 'n' runnin' hither 'n' yon like they was ants bein' stepped on. The town 's gone plum crazy over the minister bein' gone altogether. I do believe the only happy woman in it last night was Gran'ma Mullins, 'n' 'f you want to see happiness, Mrs. Lathrop, you 'd ought to see Gran'ma Mullins this day. Seems 't Mrs. Sperrit was drivin' in early last evenin' 'n' she stopped at Gran'ma Mullins to get one o' the crick stones out o'

her horse's shoe, 'n' Gran'ma Mullins was weepin' on the piazza while little Jane chewed up her spectacle-case, 'n' after she got the stone out Mrs. Sperrit jus' up 'n' took little Jane home with her. She said 't little Jane could chew all she liked out on the farm, 'n' Gran'ma Mullins said 't she all but fell on her knees at her feet. She was down town this afternoon buyin' two dozen o' cotton an' one dozen o' glue, 'n' she says 't she sh'll spend the rest o' her allotted time in peace 'n' mendin'.

"But Gran'ma Mullins' joy is more 'n balanced by Mrs. Brown, for Mrs. Brown is clean discouraged. I see her sittin' on a barrel in the grocery store, 'n' it was a molasses barrel 'n' some 'd run out, but she had n't no heart to care. She says 't Henry Ward Beecher never budged last night, 'n' so far from that bein' a relief, it led to worse 'n ever, for old Dr. Carter 'n' young Dr. Brown got so hungry observin' 't they went downstairs, 'n' young Dr. Brown knowed where everything was, 'n' as a result they eat up stuff 't Henry Ward Beecher never 'd even dreamed existed. They opened jars o' fancy pickles 'n' a jug o' rare old rum 'n'

played Ned in general. 'N' afterwards they went to bed in the guest-room where Mrs. Brown never lets any one sleep, 'n' they got right in on top o' her Hottentot pillow-shams 'n' old Dr. Carter tore a sham with his tooth-pick. 'N', added to all that, Amelia 's furious 'cause she read in a book 't teaches how to stay married 't a husband's first night out is the first rift in the lute, 'n' she was down town buyin' a dictionary so 's to be sure what a lute is afore she accuses young Dr. Brown. 'N' there 's a man over in Meadville down with a sun-stroke, 'n' they want Dr. Carter to hurry, 'n' they can't seem to make him realize nothin'. He jus' sits there in Mrs. Brown's parlor 'n' shakes his head 'n' smiles 'n' says, 'Oh, that rum, that rum!' over 'n' over. 'N' Mrs. Brown says 't if it was n't plain from the expression of his face as he means it as a compliment she certainly would be real mad, for he must 'a' downed two quarts. It 's all jus' awful, 'n' I would 'a' waited 'n' walked home with her, only Mrs. Allen come along 'n' I wanted to go with her instead. Mrs. Allen needs some sympathy too, for Polly 's all broke up over Sam 'n' Felicia Hemans. Mrs. Allen don't hesitate

to say right out 't to her order o' thinkin' Sam 'd 'a' showed more sense 'f he 'd married Mrs. Macy 'cause Mrs. Macy has got a little property 'n' it looks doubtful at present if Felicia 's got so much as a father. Mrs. Allen says they was all so used up 't when Mrs. Sperrit was in to-day she jus' traded Brunhilde Susan against the makin' o' Mr. Sperrit's summer shirts, 'n' then went right 'n' bought the cloth 'n' took the baby. Mrs. Allen says 's Mrs. Sperrit says 't Brunhilde Susan c'n learn if dogs moo out on the farm, 'n' f'r her part she 'd rather be responsible f'r any man's baby 'n for one husband's collar-bands. So Brunhilde Susan 's settled, 'n' Mrs. Allen 's awful sorry 't she did n't send the cow along with her too, for she says 't it 's harder 'n you 'd think to keep a cow content nights in a chicken-house. But she did n't think in time, so she lost the chance, 'n' as a result she was down town buyin' thread with the minister's cow on her shoulders."

Miss Clegg paused for breath. Mrs. Lathrop chewed passively.

"I must say, though, 't it 's generally admitted 't we 've seen the last o' the min-

ister. To think how he looked the mornin' he left,—in his wilted collar 'n' that coat 't Deacon White was married in,—'n' all the time his ear-muffs hid away somewhere about him! I would n't 'a' believed it—not on your honor, Mrs. Lathrop. Hind-sight 's always better 'n fore-sight, 'n' we c'n all see now 't we did a mighty foolish thing givin' him such a easy chance to get out of it. I can't see, though, how he 's ever goin' to get another place without sendin' to us f'r a good character, 'n' I 'm free to confess 't I don't believe 't the father of Augustus 'll ever get any praise from the Craigs, nor yet will the father o' little Jane from Gran'ma Mullins. The Craigs is awful mournful to think 't they ain't got no kittens from their cat, but owin' to the fact 't he was n't no kitten kind o' cat he naturally never had none. Mr. Kimball says mebbe the hairs from his tail 'll turn into suthin' in the well like the hairs in horse's tails do in waterin'-troughs. But 'f horse's hairs make snakes, I sh'd naturally suppose 't cat's hairs would make mud-turtles, 'n' it ain't no mud-turtle 't Mrs. Craig wants. She wants suthin' to warm her feet on

winters, 'n' she told me with tears in her eyes 't he never scratched when he was rocked on, 'n' she used to rock on him so often 't by spring he was all wore off in spots 'n' most wore through in some places.

"Mrs. Jilkins was up from Cherry Pond to-day f'r the first time since she took Josephus home with her las' Saturday mornin'. She was awful surprised to hear all the bother 't all the rest have been havin'. She says 't she ain't had no bother a *tall.* She says 't she whipped Josephus nine times the day 't she took him home with her, 'n' since then she's taught him to read 'n' write 'n' sew patchwork 'n' beat up batter. She says 'f she'd 'a' had Henry Ward Beecher he would n't 'a' roamed but once, nor would little Jane 'a' give but one suck, nor Fox but one yell, nor would Augustus 'a' throwed but one cat down *her* well. Mrs. Craig was standin' right there, 'n' she spoke up pretty sharp at that 'n' said 't he had n't throwed but one cat in her well 'n' she wanted that distinctly understood. Mrs. Jilkins jus' laughed, but then some one up 'n' told her about the minister bein' gone f'r good, 'n' she very quickly changed her tune.

"That blow 's goin' to fall heaviest on Mrs. Sperrit, though, for she 's got the five littlest ones 's well 's Bobby, 'n' I miss my guess 'f she don't have another to-morrow, for Mrs. Brown says 't she 's goin' to send Henry Ward Beecher out there of an errand jus' so 's to see if he 'll sleep after a ten-mile walk, 'n' every one knows 't she 's jus' doin' it in the hope 't Mrs. Sperrit 'll keep him."

"Let 's go out—" Mrs. Lathrop suggested.

"It 'll be cooler outside," Susan acquiesced; so they quitted the table and went out on the porch.

"Mrs. Brown ain't a bit reconciled about her rare old rum," she went on when they were seated; "she 's bad enough used up over the preserves, but the rum she can't seem to get reconciled to. She says 't a saltspoonful was a sure cure f'r anythin', 'n' Dr. Carter was perfectly sound in mind 'n' body 'n' got away with two quarts."

There was a silence broken only by a frog's far croak.

"I ain't a doubt but this is the worst hot spell the c'mmunity 's ever had to deal with," the younger woman remarked after a

while, "'n' the result is 't I'd never recommend no other town to choose such a time to give their minister a fair field 'n' no favor. I c'n only say one thing, Mrs. Lathrop, 'n' that is 't I've begun to feel 't I've misjudged the minister. I never would 'a' give him credit for anythin' like this. 'N' while I think he'd ought not to 'a' done it, still I must say 't I can't but admire — if he had it in him to try — how well he's carried it off.

"'N' to think 't, after all, it was our idea 's give him the chance!"

That Friday afternoon — just one week from the forever to be remembered meeting of the Sewing Society — Mrs. Lathrop, sleeping the sleep of the stout and elderly in her kitchen rocker, was suddenly aroused to a swaying sense of the world about her by the sound of her name, the same being pronounced in her neighbor's voice, the key of that voice being pitched uncommonly high.

"Mrs. Lathrop! — Mrs. Lathrop! — oh-h-h, Mrs. *Lathrop!*"

Mrs. Lathrop got to the window as fast

as her somewhat benumbed members would allow.

Susan was standing on her own side of the fence, her eyes glowing with excitement.

"The minister 's come back!"

Mrs. Lathrop simply fell out of the door and down the back steps. As she hastened towards the fence, her usual custom led her to hastily snatch a handful of her favorite blend, and then —

"When —" she gasped.

"This afternoon, right after lunch. You never hear the like in all your life! Where do you suppose he was all this week? Just nowhere at all! Out on the farm! Yes, Mrs. Lathrop," as that worthy clung to the fence for support in her overwhelming astonishment, —"yes, Mrs. Lathrop, he 'n' his wife were out there on the farm all the time. Seems 't that night when Mrs. Allen come in 'n' told 'em 't they 'd got to go on a vacation so early the nex' mornin', they was all upset. They did n't have no money nor no clothes nor no place to go to, 'n' the minister's wife begun to cry jus' 's soon 's Mrs. Allen was gone. Seems she was settin' there cryin' when Mrs. Sperrit drove

in, in the cool o' the evenin', to pay her pew-rent in pigs-feet, 'n' what did Mrs. Sperrit do but jus' up 'n' ask 'em both to come out to the farm. Told 'em they would n't have no board to pay out on the farm 'n' 't they could stay 's long 's they liked. It seemed like it was all they could do, so they arranged it 'n' it all worked fine. Seems they took the train to the junction, 'n' Mr. Sperrit met 'em there 'n' drove 'em straight across country home, 'n' they 've been there ever since, 'n' maybe they 'd been there yet, only Mrs. Sperrit is like a lot o' other people in this world, — she 's forever goin' to extremes, 'n' she could n't be content with jus' the minister 'n' his wife 'n' Bobby, so she had to keep bringin' home more 'n' more o' the childern, until they was so thick out there 't to-day, when Henry Ward Beecher arrived, the minister went to Mr. Sperrit 'n' asked him if he thought anybody 'd mind 'f he 'n' his wife come in town 'n' finished their vacation in their own house. I guess mebbe the Sperrits was some wore out themselves, f'r they jus' told him 't no one could possibly object, 'n' then they had the carryall 'n' drove 'em both in town right after dinner.

"I was down in the square buyin' fly-paper, 'n' I heard the commotion 'n' run out, 'n' — well, Mrs. Lathrop, you c'n believe me or not jus' 's you please — but it was a sight to draw tears to any one's eyes. Folks waved anythin' 't they could grab, 'n' all the boys yelled 'n' cheered. The minister was real touched — he quoted, 'N' there went up a great multitude' — but he never got no further, f'r Deacon White jumped up in the band-stand 'n' proposed 'No church Sunday, but a donation party Saturday night. Who bids?' 'n' every one shrieked, 'Aye — Aye.'"

Mrs. Lathrop's eyes kindled slowly but surely.

"I wish — " she said, biting firmly into a large red one.

"It 's too late now," said Susan, not unkindly, "it 's all over now — all 'xcept the donation party, 'n' I don't see how you c'n do much there 'nless I bring over the butter 'n' mix it for you. But you must n't interrupt me, Mrs. Lathrop, f'r if you do I never shall get through.

"So the donation party was decided, 'n' Mrs. Brown's good cookin' heart come out

strong 'n' she pledged three pies right then n' there. I put myself down f'r a pan o' biscuit, 'n' Mr. Kimball said he believed 's the Allens would outdo every one 'n' give a whole cow, without no urgin' neither. Mrs. Allen laughed a little, 'n' then Mrs. Macy come up so out o' breath 't it was all o' five minutes afore she could get out a word. Seemed when she *did* speak, 't she was n't tryin' to give nothin' — she only wanted to know about the minister's ear-muffs, 'n' it appears 't he never took 'em a *tall*. Seems 't Brunhilde Susan cut teeth on 'em till they was only fit to be used f'r kettle-holders."

Susan paused for a second. Mrs. Lathrop chewed and waited. In a minute the narrative flowed on.

"When every one else was through, Mrs. Sperrit said 't if she could take 'Liza Em'ly home with her to help look after the little ones she 'd be willin' to keep 'em a fortnight more 'n' let the minister — 'n' his wife — have a real good rest in their own house. Mrs. Maxwell spoke right up 'n' said she c'd have 'Liza Em'ly 'n' welcome, 'n' Mrs. Sweet said she c'd have Rachel Rebecca too. But

Mrs. Fisher crowded round in front 'n' said she nor no one could n't have John Bunyan not now 'n' not never, f'r he 'd weeded 'n' mowed 'n' grafted 'n' busted his way right into her heart 'n' she was intendin' to keep him right along 'f the minister 'd give his consent.

"She said 't Mr. Fisher felt jus' 's she did too, 'cause he 'd never been so happy 's he's been since he 's had John Bunyan to teach the fancy principles o' plain things to. Mr. Fisher come up jus' 's she got through, 'n' he said whatever she 'd said he 'd stand to, for although John Bunyan was nothin' but a darn fool now, he had the makin' of a man in him, 'n' he — Mr. Fisher — was jus' the one to bring him out.

"The crowd was gettin' so big 't folks began to climb up on things to see over, 'n' the horse was some restless, so Mr. Kimball got up on the edge o' the waterin'-trough an' said, 'Three cheers for the minister, 'n' may he never know how glad the town is to see him back,' 'n' then every one cheered, 'n' Mr. Kimball begin to shake, 'n' jus' 's the minister drove off he missed his hold 'n' fell into the waterin'-trough, 'n' I did n't feel no

kind o' interest in lookin' on at his fishin' out, so I come away."

"I hope —" began Mrs. Lathrop.

"I do too," rejoined her friend, "but there ain't no danger. It was the edge bein' so slippery 't let him fall in, 'n' I don't wish to seem revengeful, but I mus' say, Mrs. Lathrop, that if anythin' could 'a' made a nice end to the minister's vacation, it was the seein' Mr. Kimball get soaked, f'r he ain't had no kind o' sufferin' with it all 'n' has just everlastingly enjoyed kitin' around the outside 'n' seein' other folks in trouble. 'N' I 've no sympathy with such a nature when it does fall into a waterin'-trough, 'n' so I come home."

Miss Clegg ceased speaking.

Mrs. Lathrop chewed her clover.

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